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Sailing through transition

Change is inevitable and can be physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually draining. **Melissa Nazareth** explores ways to embrace it and grow with it rather than resist and fight it

I came to Mumbai only in January this year. Not only have I had to adapt to the city's lifestyle, which is less comfortable than that of my previous base in the Middle East, but also to my new role as a wife and homemaker. It has been tough juggling work and home, and there have been times when I have felt that I end up doing most of the chores. Leaving a successful career behind and starting from scratch has been the toughest. After months of battling despondency and frustration, I decided that I didn't want to continue living like a victim. That was when I took responsibility for my situation. I started focussing on my blessings – I have had to lay the foundation to my career in a new city but at least I have a job; I miss my parents dearly but at least I have my husband for companionship.

I am still reeling from the relocation and there are moments when I feel low even today. That said, I've found ways to keep going: I am a result-oriented person and so, make a checklist for the day, and commend myself for every task accomplished. Food comforts me and so, my husband and I cook together or call in our favourite dishes every now and then. We've even cleverly divided the housework between us.

Even though we love our comfort zones, it's a known fact that nothing ever grows over there. Change is the unchangeable law of life, often putting us through many difficulties and challenges. And though we would rather not have them, they inevitably help us grow stronger, wiser and more capable. Only after we have persisted, and gone through the long haul that we realise the gifts hidden within the unwanted changes that came our way.

Yet, unwelcome changes can be very hard to cope with. During these times, having a spiritual, more

broader perspective can help a person sail through transitions. So often these transitions alone are the cause that trigger a spiritual inquiry in a person.

Radical changes in life

Monisha Kumar Gumber, a popular name in Indian children's literature is the author of *Sick of Being Healthy*, a cult-book among India's youth, and *Dying to Live*. She addresses pertinent issues like the challenges of teenage and suicides by young people in her books. Recalling her journey from being a sceptic to a believer, the former 'sought-after sales and marketing pro' says that it's the many changes in her life that have helped her evolve and become spiritual.

"In 2001, I quit my job at one of India's biggest IT training companies to get married," says Monisha. She had her first baby during this time and moved to Bahrain with her husband. Even though she enjoyed being a homemaker, within months she began feeling restless and in 2005, took up a job with a well-known global IT company. "It was great to return to the corporate world but I felt guilty to leave behind my two and half-year old for work." Monisha desperately prayed for a reason to stay at home. That's when she got her 'excuse', albeit temporary. "I became pregnant for the second time and decided take a break once again till my son turned two."

Monisha describes those two years as the happiest of her life. "My world revolved around my children, especially my son. He was funny and clever, and I had a gut feeling that he would radically transform my life." Which he did, but in ways never thought by Monisha.

Her son didn't speak until he was two years old, which worried her. When she took him to a speech therapist, she found out that he had a disorder. "He wasn't just a late talker but also had trouble comprehending languages."

Monisha's high hopes came crashing down. She slipped into a spiral of anger, helplessness, frustration, confusion and sadness. "I was completely disoriented and unprepared to handle this problem. Moreover, it was almost time for me to resume work at my previous company."

Jay Mehta, a single mother and math teacher living in Mumbai, dated her ex-husband for six years before they tied the knot and moved to the USA. Though she had her reservations about some of his habits, she believed things would change once they got married. "I was around 20 years old, and like most people that age, immature," she recalls. "When our daughter was one year old, I realised we were not compatible but didn't have the courage to go through a divorce." Jay



Dealing with transitions courageously helped Monisha reach her highest potential

didn't want her daughter to miss her father and strongly believed that a child needs both parents while growing up. "I didn't realise that living with unhappy parents was affecting her. I was confused and unable to make decisions with clarity of thought and purity of heart. I was constantly bored, fatigued, angry, bitter and unhappy," she recalls.

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The turning point

Both Monisha and Jay had come to a breaking point. Life ahead was full of major transitions. It required both of them to develop new spiritual muscle and skill-sets to adapt to and overcome the challenges before them.

It took Jay nine years to begin making the transition; to fully prepare her body, mind and soul to end her marriage. Ultimately spirituality came to her rescue.

Jay's parents had been writing to Pujyashri Gurudev Rakeshbhai Jhaveri, head of Srimad Rajchandra Mission, in Gujarat, about her



Jay was able to overcome the challenges in her personal life with the help of Guruji Rakeshbhai

strained relationship with her husband. "I was deeply touched by Guruji's discourse on 'wisdom for cooling the flames of anger' and immediately wrote to him expressing my desire to be his disciple. He graciously accepted my request and that was the next step of my transition phase. I became peaceful and, hence, more powerful to take charge of my life. Through deep introspection I realised that a mutually consented separation would be best for all three of us." Jay not only separated from her husband on good terms but also, some years later, introduced her friend, who was divorced, to her ex-husband. Today, they are happily married and share good relations with both, Jay and her daughter. "Regular satsangs and monthly retreats under the grace of my Guruji empowered and elevated me. Ever since, I've been religiously practicing modalities including meditation, affirmations and mirror work as well as regular introspection, gratitude and forgiveness, which have been instrumental in my transformation.

For Monisha, her love for her son became the driving force of her major life decisions. And once she made up her mind and squared her shoulders, there was no looking back. Monisha, realised that her destiny didn't lie in a nine to five job but rather at home with her son. "I became his full time, exclusive speech therapist and read extensively about his disorder. Around the same time, I developed an interest in alternative healing prac-

tices and got introduced to homeopathy and Reiki. I learnt whatever I could about these modalities and even met my health guru, Mariette. I trusted her to do the right thing for my family and from there began my healing journey, rather our healing journey together (my son's and mine)." She also did a course with the Art of Living community in Bahrain and was deeply drawn towards spirituality, which she believes greatly helped her sail through the transition.

Shedding further light on how she transformed from a sceptic to a believer, Monisha says, "I used to be cynical about most things even if they were perfectly logical. For instance, I didn't believe in homeopathy even though I had experienced relief from common colds through the practice. I thought Art of Living was a waste of time and

resisted it." Today, having experienced healing from serious health issues that modern medicine couldn't cure, she truly believes that homeopathy is the most scientific, rational and superior form of medicine. Further, she has witnessed positive transformations in her life through the learning she received at the Art of Living course.

New destinations

This transformation led Monisha to new horizons. She used to customise booklets for her son in order to teach him to read when he was two and a half and that's when she got interested in children's literature. "My husband was at my back to pursue writing but I didn't take it seriously enough. Although I was at that time working for my husband's firm somewhere deep down I felt that I wasn't doing anything concrete. My daughter was in her pre-teens by then and I decided to write a story for teen girls." Through *Sick of Being Healthy*, Monisha wanted to pen down the many things she wanted to tell her daughter without sounding preachy. One thing led to another and she ended up writing a sequel too. Not only are both the books bestsellers of their categories but also have a fan following of a whopping 90,000 on Facebook! She is also working on a third part of the teen book series and will soon be releasing her first adult fiction book.

Bridges' transition model

Anyone who has taken birth has to go through transitions in life. Some cope with them practically and optimistically, while others complain and resist. Wouldn't it be great to have a user manual on dealing

with transitions, to help people navigate through the choppy waters of life?

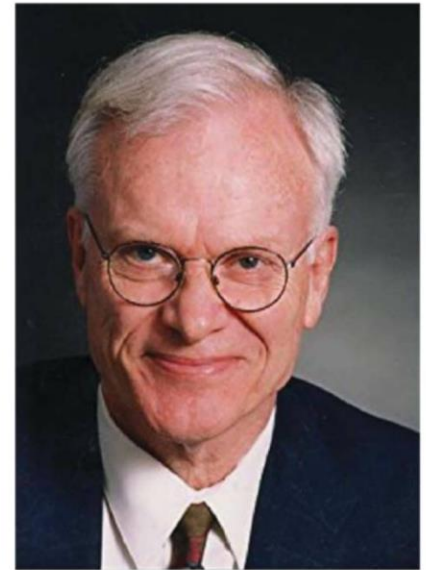
American author, speaker, and organisational consultant, William Bridges, has analysed this phase threadbare to facilitate greater understanding of this phenomena. He emphasised the importance of understanding transitions as fundamental for organisations to succeed in making changes. He believed transitions are the psychological process of adapting to change. Bridge's Transition Model cuts out three phases: letting go of the past, the neutral zone where the past is gone but the new isn't fully present, and making the new beginning. Bridges adds that people go through each stage at their own pace.

Let's analyse this model from the viewpoint of personal transitions.

Letting go of the past: This stage is often marked with resistance and common emotions including denial, anger, sadness, disorientation, frustration, uncertainty and a sense of loss. It's important at this stage to accept that a particular phase of your life is ending before you prepare yourself for the new phase. Try not to judge yourself for feeling a particular way. Rather be kind to yourself; remember, you're doing the best you can. Talking to family and friends helps and may even give you an objective, better still, optimistic, view of the situation.

Neutral zone: The second stage is a bridge where you're attached to the old while trying to adapt to the new. Common emotions include resentment to the new, low morale and productivity, anxiety and scepticism. Again, be gentle with yourself. Set realistic, short term goals and pat yourself on the back or reward yourself when you achieve them. Sometimes, you may feel that not much progress is being made. Don't let that dampen your morale. Pause often. When you find that you're tired of running, walk; and when you're tired of walking, crawl; but don't stop and always remind yourself why you began in the first place.

Making a new beginning: The final stage is all about continuing and sustaining the change. It's a challenge but high energy, openness to new possibilities and renewed commitment will keep you in check. At least that's what Zahabiya Ali, student of mass media in Mumbai, experienced when she moved to the city to pursue higher education. "It took me no less than three months to begin settling in," she says. Zahabiya rented a small apartment with a few girls from her hometown but it was not easy because she was used to staying in a bungalow back home. Moreover, travelling was a challenge because she was used to going around in cars but now had to use public transportation. Food was another issue and Zahabiya terribly missed home cooked meals. "I was homesick, constantly crying and had almost decided to return to Indore. But then, I accepted what I



William Bridges considers transitions as keys to making significant changes in life

couldn't change and focussed on the possibilities. As time passed by, things began to fall in place. I found new roommates and made some friends in college, and no longer felt lonely. We got a good tiffin service and divided household chores, which further eased my situation. I eventually adapted to travelling by buses and trains too. Additionally, I kept myself busy with college projects and fests. I went back to painting, my hobby, and even joined a social service club in college."

English author HG Wells rightly said, "Adapt or perish, now as ever, is nature's inexorable imperative." We usually resist change because we see it as an end rather than a new beginning. That is why we suffer more than benefit from it. We forget that all good things come to an end for better things. Many a time, those better things are packaged as painful transitions but if we persist till the end of the tunnel, we will definitely see light.



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