

The Cycle of Change

As many of us are facing changes in our lives at this time of a pandemic in the world, I thought it appropriate to remind ourselves of the process that we move through when we are making changes in our lives, whether they be big or small, physical, mental, or emotional. Each of us will go through the stages of this process at a different pace and face different challenges, but it is helpful to recognise what is happening and to realise that we are moving forward towards completing change in our lives.

As we move through the five stages of the cycle of change our final goal will often develop and grow as part of the journey, as we define what it is that we are wanting. During times of significant change, such as the impacts of the global pandemic, we might find that we are triggered to make changes in other aspects of our lives. Inevitably each aspect will overlap and interact with each other.

Multiple changes overlapping may feel confusing, but it is important to trust that we are moving in the right direction. If we are able to follow the direction that our heart is pointing us in, then we will arrive at the right destination at the right time, even if it is totally different from where we thought we were heading. As with so many things in our lives, it is a matter of trusting ourselves and our inner voice.

The five stages in any cycle of change are:

- The Status Quo
- The Challenge
- The Chaos
- The New Perspective
- Integration

The Status Quo

This is where we are currently in our life, externally and internally. It covers our life, our career, our financial position, and our relationships. It is all our beliefs and patterns that define who we think we are. Our natural tendency is to try to maintain that status quo because it gives us a degree of certainty and security – it is our comfort zone.

However, the more we try to stay in this place and stop changes and forward movement, then greater tension will develop in our life and ourselves. Eventually

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something will give and we will either choose to change or life situations will force us to change.

The Challenge – Chosen or Forced

This is the point where something gives. It might be something minor like an argument with our partner, something major such as the death of someone close to us, a life-threatening illness, or a serious car accident. At this point it becomes impossible for us to maintain the status quo and we have to take steps to change.

Most people, at this stage, resist the change and do their best to maintain their status quo. Often we don't realise there is a bigger picture and it is time for us to move forward. The change may require us to let go of attachments in our current life or to totally change our circumstances. These changes will take us out of our comfort zone.

Throughout this stage, we may experience a range of emotions such as anger, denial, sadness, depression, guilt, regret, fear, or confusion. We will move through this stage once we have managed to deal with these emotional upheavals.

The Chaos

We move into the stage of chaos because it feels like there is a breakdown of the old structures and certainties that we lived by. What was fixed and stable, becomes fluid and unstable. Ways of thinking and behaving that have always worked for us, no longer do so. We can be left feeling confused, scared, rudderless, and out of control. We lose our sense of direction and no longer have a clear view of where we are heading.

However, chaos opens us to new possibilities. It is only by letting go of old patterns, structures, and beliefs that we allow room to grow and change.

For us to be able to see these new possibilities we need to:

- practice some degree of withdrawal from the busyness of our life to give ourselves time to go within and listen
- be prepared to wait patiently for the dust to settle so that we can move forward into what our heart desires
- learn to be comfortable with not knowing what is in the future – to live in the now.

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Through the chaos stage, we may be challenged to examine everything in our life including our diet, work, relationships, living environment, beliefs about life, plans for the future, and our hobbies. We are opening ourselves up for something new to grow.

The New Perspective

At this stage we are becoming receptive to new possibilities. Gradually we feel we are ready to make the changes. We have done most of our grieving for the old and have changed our outlook to include the new.

Depending on the size and significance of the change we have come through, the new meaning may result in a minor change in our diet, or it could lead to a completely new lifestyle. All changes, large or small, within us, and within our life, go through the same stages.

This is a time of energy and hope. We have come to a point where we are no longer focusing on what we have lost but rather are looking forward to a new future. This can be a very creative time as we start to make new plans and set new goals and expectations.

If we have been through a major change, we may become aware of:

- a new sensitivity or awareness within ourselves
- a greater sense of peace, joy, and acceptance in our life
- a new sensitivity to the beauty of nature
- a deeper appreciation of other people without our previous judgements
- a greater awareness of what our body needs.

Integration

At this stage we are setting the changes in our life in concrete, by acting on them. As we integrate the changes, we will generally feel a release of energy and a renewed enthusiasm for all things.

After a major change in our life, it will take time to integrate and maintain the changes, so it is important to be patient with ourselves. One of the challenges we will continue to face will be our own misgivings. Any changes that we make can bring up deeper fears and self-doubt and we may question if we have done the right thing.

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The root of most of these misgivings is fear. Face these fears with love, allow yourself to let them go and focus on living in the now.

Another challenge we may face is that the excitement and energy that the changes give us, will feel like we can fly. It is always important to take things slowly at first until we feel our feet are firmly on Mother Earth, and we have a good understanding of who the new us is.

All changes in our lives take time and it takes courage to see them through. Be patient with yourself and take the time to go within to access your inner guidance.

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