

BEING IN THE UNKNOWN

by Deb Elkin

What is this place we call the “unknown?” It is the space we occupy when we are in the middle of change and we don’t know where we are going or what it will look like on the other side. It is an in-between place, a waiting place. It’s a place we sit in when we can’t go back to what we were doing or how we were living, but we don’t exactly know what we’re going to do next or what form being in life will take.

When we quit a job we can’t tolerate any more or we get laid off, when we leave a significant relationship or get left, when life just doesn’t work any more, when we realize we don’t much like ourselves and who we’ve become, these are situations that can send us into the unknown. We feel confused, we are unhappy, we lose ourselves, we may feel like we are drowning. Sometimes we panic because it feels so overwhelming and we can’t see our way out.

Most of us fear this place. We feel out of control and we’re scared by it. We usually work hard to avoid it and not have to experience the feelings that go with it, because being in the unknown IS a very uncomfortable and scary place to be. It is usually very lonely there too. It is often a time when we withdraw – we hate how it feels, we don’t want anyone to see us that way, we don’t know how to talk about it anyway. Often, we carry shame for being in that place. And we feel very vulnerable.

So, no wonder we want to avoid being in the unknown. We just want to fix it and move on! Well, let me tell you about some of the gifts of spending time in this place.

- Going into the unknown is a natural part of being alive. It is something that we all experience at different times in our lives. It is part of living and of growing. It is a universal experience and is nothing we need to be ashamed of.
- When we accept the naturalness of being in the unknown, we learn to relax into it (rather than fight it or panic). Acceptance gives us a sense of peace, of knowing that we are OK, even though we don’t know what’s next. We can breathe again.
- There is nothing wrong with not knowing. We need to give ourselves permission to not know (acceptance again), to wait while we search for our answers. From that place, we let go of our inner tension and panic. When we are not holding on so tightly, we then open the channels for inner listening and guidance. And when we can do that, clarity is always there.
- This process requires time and patience. It is often not a quick fix. Waiting and listening time is needed for us to truly heal and grow. Quick fixes feel better in the short run. But when we don’t take the time to really nurture and

heal the issue at hand, we usually end up revisiting the wound and have to go through it all over again.

Pema Chodron, in When Things Fall Apart, says, “When things fall apart and we’re on the verge of we know not what, the test of each of us is to stay on that brink.” Facing fear, allowing ourselves to enter and live in the unknown, takes a lot of courage. But it is where our healing lies. And it is from here that we get the clarity we need to truly live out our dreams.