

# The GIFT



## BOOK DIGEST

### ONE BUTT, TWO CHAIRS

### THE PRISON OF: SECRETS

Freedom, explains our author, occurs when we're living with authenticity, and when our ideal and real self become congruent. We can only live a double life for so long before it catches up with us. The goal is to learn how to sit in what she calls:

*"The chair of your own fulfillment."*

Edith Eger recalls the story of a client who was finding her way back to herself with her lover, but didn't want to leave her husband because of the effect it would have on her children. She shares how she led her to understand that her freedom has nothing to do with choosing the right man; it lied in finding her way to express her fears, hopes and desires in ANY relationship. If she didn't heal that pattern, history would otherwise only rewrite itself.

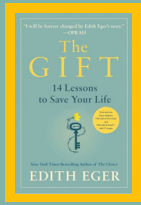
We enter relationships filled with passion and connection, without the proper skills and awareness of the time needed to work on daily irritations and worries before they turn into hurt and anger. And the longer we wait to talk those things through, the harder it gets and the faster they turn into tension and arguments, when we finally muster the courage to broach the subject. So we avoid them and we grow apart, living separate lives... while living together.

Relationships are co-creation. Relationships strains are never one person's fault. And affairs are always secondary secrets following one we shouldn't have kept, such as concealing our needs and desires.

*"Honesty starts with learning to tell the truth to yourself."*

Edith Eger offered her two exercises for that:

- **The vital Signs:** an invitation to take our own temperature and check-in with our inner realm and emotions a few times a day, by asking a simple question: "Do I feel soft and warm, or cold and stiff?"
- **Pattern Interruption:** a prompting to consciously replace an habitual response by a different response, such as reaching out every time we feel compelled to withdraw from somebody else.



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We can only heal once we stop disowning parts of ourselves. What we try to repress or silence will only get louder to get our attention. The author spent years trying to forget what had happened to her and to try to hide it in order to fit in, to feel accepted and normal. It took her decades to realize that:

*“Until I could face the truth, I had my secret and my secret had me.”*

She realized why she felt as an impostor as a doctor and measured the cost of her double life: she couldn't free and heal her inner sixteen year-old trapped in denial and perfectionism since Auschwitz.

*“I was trying to heal others without healing myself.”*

And we must realize that our secrets impact everyone we live with, including our children. Children feel the fear and tension and it can be all the more overwhelming for them when they don't know where it's coming from and what it is about. She could measure it in her sessions with Ruth, the daughter of Holocaust survivors who couldn't reconcile her happy-on-paper on childhood with the sense of dread that she had inherited. The author explains that:

*“A sense of foreboding threaded its way through many experiences, however pleasurable or mundane. Picking up on her parents' unspoken trauma and fear, she, too, developed a belief that something was wrong, that something terrible was about to happen.”*

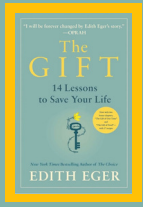
And the worst part is that even after becoming a psychiatrist herself, she couldn't figure out why she was feeling this way. It took reading *The Choice* and going back to Hungary to deeply understand her parents' past, for her to heal and connect the dots of how her inner world had been impacted by the untold and the unseen. Only by bringing back congruence within herself could she finally understand the roots of her anxiety and release it.

*“Hiding or minimizing our truth doesn't protect our loved ones.*

*Protecting them means working to heal the past so we don't inadvertently pass the trauma on to them.”*

For Edith Eger, it took reading Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search For Meaning*. She resisted the idea of reading someone else's retell of what had happened to her in Auschwitz, but when she started reading she realized that it made her finally feel seen.

She also saw a new possibility for herself, one without any hiding or secrets involved, one where she would be able to stop running from her past. Thanks to his book and later on his mentorship, she found ways to express her truth and to reclaim her genuine self.



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She shares that:

*“Reckoning and release are impossible when we keep secrets—when we operate under a code of denial, delusion, or minimization.”*

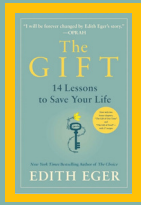
Freedom lies in truth-telling. We can only be free once we’ve recreated a climate of acceptance and love within ourselves.

*“Sometimes the demand to keep a secret is unspoken or unconscious.  
Sometimes others buy our silence with threats or force.*

*Either way, secrets are harmful because they create and sustain a climate for shame,  
and shame is the bottom line of any addiction.”*

**And here are this chapter’s KEYS to free ourselves from self-neglect:**

- **“If you sit with one butt on two chairs, you become half-assed”** (Hungarian proverb): she invites us to actually test it out and witness the difference between the grounding that one chair can provide versus how unsettling it feels to sit in between two chairs at once.
- **Honesty starts within ourselves:** let’s practice the Vital Signs Exercise as a community!
- **Truth telling in safe spaces:** the author encourages us to find a group or community where we can share our truth safely and wholeheartedly.



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### NO ONE REJECTS YOU BUT YOU

#### THE PRISON OF: GUILT & SHAME

Edith Eger shares that it took her decades to forgive herself for surviving... She didn't even attend her graduation ceremony, asking herself instead who was she to still be there and celebrate her achievements when her parents, grand-parents and millions of others had died but not her.

*“Even an occasion of celebration and accomplishments was tainted by my certainty that I was damaged goods, unworthy of joy, that every bad thing was somehow my fault, that it was only a matter of time before everyone discovered how broken I was.”*

Guilt is different from remorse. Remorse is an appropriate experience to allow us to learn from our mistakes. It's a function of grief. She explains that:

*“Remorse is in the present. And it can coexist with forgiveness and freedom.”*

She reminds us that no one is born with shame! However, the shame messages can start very early... at home, at school, and not necessarily because of ill-intended people. And as usual the goal of reviewing our past is not to blame those who mistreated us but to reconnect with our wounds. Because, as she recalls:

*“Ultimately the trouble wasn't what my family told me. The trouble was that I believed it.”*

And the problem is that we then KEEP believing it our entire lives.

*“You always have a choice about what to do with the information life hands you.”*

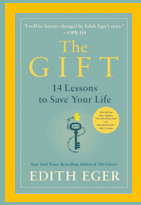
She shares a pattern of hers that will feel relatable for most:

*“To counteract my belief that I was damaged, I strove for perfection, believing I could achieve and perform my way out of shame.”*

She adds:

*“But we're human, no more, no less, and humans means fallible.”*

**We can only be free once we accept ourselves in all our imperfections.**



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It's important to realize that guilt and shame don't come from the outside! They come from within us. We get caught up on the idea of having been rejected by them, him or her but the author writes:

*“Rejection is just a word we make up to express the feeling we have when we don't get what we want. Who said everyone should love us? Which God said that we should get what we want, when we want it, how we want it, the way we want it? And who said that having it all is any guarantee?”*

**“No one rejects you but you.”**

Indeed, we choose the meaning we make of anything.

It's important to realize that someone's critique has more to do with the people offering it than with us. It transcribes their expectations, what makes them feel safe, or superior, or acknowledged. Our job is only to check within ourselves whether there's something supporting our growth and creativity in what they said! If so, we can take the nuggets of wisdom without the energy of judgment. If not, we can simply let it go. She writes:

*“If we're to live free of shame, we don't let others' evaluations define us.”*

She reminds us that:

*“We choose how we talk to ourselves.”*

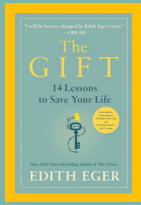
And she urges us to spend a day listening to our own self-talk!

**“You weren't born with shame. Your genuine self is already beautiful. You were born with love and joy and passion, and you can rewrite your internal script and reclaim your innocence. You can become a whole person.”**

We then meet Michelle, a woman who was known as the best caretaker one could hope for, except herself. She was kind, generous, accomplished AND she had learned to abandon herself to the point of starving herself. As Edith Eger explains, food deprivation can feel like the only thing we can control when we have abdicated our power to others and feel powerless in life. In the case of Michelle, she was trying to literally minimize herself to stop feeling minimized by her husband controlling behaviors. The author explains:

*“Learning to stand up for herself meant opening up her intense shame—all the pain she was trying to hold down by starving.”*

Michelle had to reconnect with her childhood trauma which included sexual abuse, emotional unavailability and regular beatings. She had to feel the terror and the pain in very small increments so that she would be able to tolerate it, feel it, and heal. She unrooted debilitating fear of abandonment and over the course of three years she transformed her relationship with food and with her husband.



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She still has work to do and is now releasing three deeply harmful thought patterns which are:

*“it’s my fault, I don’t deserve it, and it could have been worse.”*

Edith Eger extends us this invitation:

*“If you want to take charge of your thinking, first examine what you’re practicing, and then decide: is it empowering or depleting me? Before you say anything, especially to yourself, ask “Is it kind and loving?”*

*“Remember you’re the only one you’ll never lose.  
You can look outside yourself to feel cherished—or you can learn to cherish yourself.”*

We get so focused on our quest to understand what happened and why... but the author highlights that it’s not always serving us:

*“Certain things we’ll never understand. Sometimes we develop guilt in order to gain a sense of control over things that are completely out of our control, that we didn’t cause or choose.”*

And at any moment we can choose to stop spending our energy on trying to find a reason for why the abuse happened... We can release our compulsion to minimize what happened too. We can start practicing kindness instead. We can relearn how to give ourselves permission for pleasure.

First we acknowledge the wounds, that’s how we free ourselves. Then we can let the pain go and replenish, that’s how we come back to life.

*“Loving yourself is the only foundation for wholeness, health, and joy.  
So fall in love with yourself! It’s NOT narcissistic.  
Once you begin to heal, what you discover will not be the new you, but the REAL you.  
The you that you were all along, beautiful, born with love and joy.”*

**And here are this chapter’s KEYS to free ourselves from self-neglect:**

- **We made it:** it’s time to hug the wounded parts of us and to exchange our feelings of worthlessness for love.
- **What we pay attention to grows stronger:** so let’s be very mindful of our self-talk, our tendencies to blame ourselves, to minimize what is happening to us, to should ourselves all day long. She invites us to start going to our mirrors in the morning and say “I’m powerful. I’m kind. I’m a person of strength.” and to then kiss ourselves on the back of each hand and end with “I love you.” Why not?