

The GIFT



BOOK DIGEST

ARE YOU EVOLVING OR REVOLVING?

THE PRISON OF: PARALYZING FEAR

When Edith Eger first started considering getting a PhD, she realized she would be 50 by the time she gets it... and her supervisor changed her life by answering “You’ll be fifty anyway.” So she’s passing on this message to us:

“Honey you’ll be fifty anyway—or thirty or sixty or ninety. So you might as well take a risk. Do something you’ve never done before. Change is synonymous with growth. To grow, you’ve got to evolve instead of revolve.”

For our author, the role of the therapist is to stretch us, survivor to survivor, to show us how to release our self-limiting beliefs and unleash our true potential.

She recalls Gloria’s story who survived an extremely violent childhood only to then be raped by her uncle at thirteen... and on top of all these trauma, no one believed her. Committed to keeping her children safe by any means necessary but also terrified that her children would pay the consequences for her unresolved anguish and grief, she sought Edith Eger’s help, who advised that:

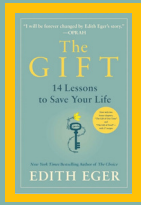
“We should never stop seeking safety and justice, doing everything in our power to protect ourselves, our loved ones, our neighbors, our fellow humans. But we have a choice about how much of our lives we give over to fear.”

WHAT IF is the hook Fear uses to imprison us and to floor us with the terror of dying from an ordeal we already survived. In those moments, the author urges us to take our own hand and thank our fear for trying to protect us! And to simply remind Fear that: **“This was then, this is now.”** We CAN hug ourselves. We can also remind ourselves that we love ourselves.

As she reminds us:

“You can’t predict who might show up to cause harm—yell an insult, throw a punch, break a promise, betray your trust, drop a bomb, start a war.”

Our safety is not guaranteed in the world we live in and it’s a truth we must accept and live with. But fear doesn’t have to be the ruler of our lives and it’s important to make sure it’s not, because Fear and Love cannot coexist. And we’re the only one who can start the process of releasing fear.



The GIFT



BOOK DIGEST

“We hold on to fear, thinking vigilance will protect us, but fear becomes a relentless cycle, a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Indeed we're very afraid of the I TOLD YOU SO that Fear will throw at us if we proceed with our plans despite Fear's warnings...and fail. But the best protection for that is not to do nothing, it's to learn how to forgive ourselves, to love ourselves and be safe for ourselves! to stop punishing ourselves for those mistakes and pains that are inherent to any experience of life.

While helping Kathleen coping with her husband's infidelities, she guided her to realize that her fears were coming from a lack of trust in herself—and not a lack of trust in her husband.

Realizing that can turn fear into an opportunity for growth and empowerment.

She highlights that language is our better ally or foe depending on whether we use it for or against ourselves. She shares:

“I CAN'T means I'm helpless. And unless you're an infant, that simply isn't true.”

When we say “I can't”, we're really saying “I won't.” Fear is rooted in resistance, and when we're resisting, we cannot move forward, grow or connect with curiosity. We shut down our opportunities for change, we REVOLVE because we've stopped evolving.

Since our chances of success are far better when we replace something by something else instead of simply taking it away, it's time to learn to reframe all our I CAN'T into I CANs.

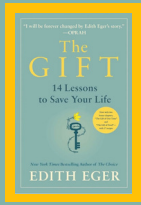
We must also be careful of the statement: “I need to.”

She reminds us that:

“Needs are things without which we can't survive. Breathing, sleeping, eating.”

She adds:

“We can stop burdening and pressuring ourselves, telling ourselves that something is necessary for our survival when it isn't. And we can stop looking at our choices as obligations.”



The GIFT



BOOK DIGEST

For instance, after adultery, we do not NEED to trust our partner again. We either want to or not. Telling ourselves that we are forced or incapable of doing something makes it so, because our thoughts create our emotions and our emotions drive our behaviors.

Since Fear uses language to imprison us, paying attention to our language is the first step into making sure we cannot be entrapped by Fear.

“Listen for the I CAN’T, the I’M TRYING, the I NEED TO, and then see if you can replace these imprisoning phrases with something else: I CAN, I WANT, I’M WILLING, I CHOOSE. This is the language that empowers us to change.”

It is OUR responsibility to align our dreams and behaviors. For instance, someone who wishes to find their way back into better sleeping patterns cannot continue to drink five cups of coffee each day.

“We can stop working so hard to go nowhere.”

Being hard on ourselves is actually one of the ways through which we resist change. We cannot change when we’re putting ourselves down, we just can’t. We just need to give ourselves clear, simple, kind directions. As she explains:

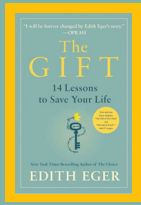
“This is how growth and learning and healing happen—by what you do, little by little, on your behalf.”

The seemingly trivial tiny changes are what drive big change. Our role is to get curious on our experience, to let ourselves feel those fears and long-seated anxieties we hold and then guide ourselves step by step on the way home.

“We aren’t born with fear. Somewhere along the way, we learn it.”

Interestingly, a lot of our fears are not even our own. We learned them unconsciously by observing others. So she invites us to write all of our fears on paper, before checking: does this fear belong to me or to one of my loved ones or family members? We can then look at all the remaining fears and start facing them (instead of fighting them). The next step is to check how realistic each of them is! Once we’ve identified which fears are actually our own and which fears somehow make sense, we can take charge of them: We can start looking for ways to prevent what we’re afraid could happen and/or to get the help we need in order to protect ourselves and build the life we want.

Also, she warns us that, most of the time, we feel stuck because we’re afraid that we’re not doing a good enough job at dealing with our circumstances—it’s rarely because we don’t know what to do. We must beware of our self-critical tendencies and impossibly high standards. She reminds us that it takes no courage to strive for perfection!



The GIFT



BOOK DIGEST

Perfectionism is actually fear and perfectionism leads to procrastination. True courage is however needed to be average, to accept that good enough is good enough.

And of course sometimes our fears are painfully realistic and we might have very limited resources to meet them. That's when we must differentiate stress and distress. Distress happens when we face constant threat and uncertainty and distress is toxic. Stress can however be a good thing and a powerful driver for change.

She shares the example set by Lauren who decided to leave her abusive husband, even though she had just received a cancer diagnosis and had limited financial means to care for her two young children. Lauren realized that staying with her husband meant distress and constantly living under the threat of violence. So she chose stress: she chose the unknown and to face her world as it was at the moment and as it might turn out following her decision, for better or for worse. She knew she would be better off than by living in an imaginary reality created by her fears.

At any moment we can decide to take a leap of faith and wonder: what does life has to offer me now?

“Curiosity is vital. It’s what allows us to risk. When we’re full of fear, we’re living in a past that already happened, or a future that hasn’t arrived. When we’re curious, we’re here in the present, eager to discover what’s going to happen next. It’s better to risk and grow, and maybe fail, than to remain imprisoned, never knowing what could have been.”

And here are this chapter’s KEYS to free ourselves from paralyzing fear:

- **I can. I want. I’m willing:** let’s keep track of our self-talk for one day and monitor how often we tell ourselves that we NEED, CAN’T, SHOULD... She reminds us that “I can’t means I won’t. I “need” and I “should” mean I’m abdicating my freedom of choice. And “I’m trying” is lying. And here are our new options to play with instead: I can, I want, I’m willing, I choose, I am.
- **Growth comes from change:** let’s do one thing differently today in comparison to yesterday. That’s how we show our brains that we are capable of change and that our choices and possibilities are actually endless. That’s how we turn our anxiety into excitement.
- **Let’s identify our fears:** Let’s make a list, cross the fears that don’t belong to us, then cross those who are not rooted in any reality and finally let’s check whether our realistic fears cause us stress or distress. Distress means we must tend immediately for our survival needs and safety. Stress is an invitation to grow and to witness what we can do to help ourselves TODAY.