

The GIFT



BOOK DIGEST

THE NAZI IN YOU

THE PRISON OF: JUDGMENT

Edith Eger visited Lausanne, Switzerland to give a talk in one of Europe's top business schools. That's where she met Andreas, a man who embodies what she describes as:

"the pain that's passed on when a secret is kept."

It took many years for Andreas to finally excavate his family's secret and the reason behind both his father's and uncle's alcoholism or why his grandfather, Hermann, was so rarely mentioned. Hermann had joined the first Nazi party in 1927 and remained a Nazi until the end of the war, when he was sent to a prisoner-of-war camp. Hermann was also Andreas's middle name, a middle name he changed in an attempt to untangle his identity from his grandfather's, feeling contaminated by any association with his ancestor.

And here's what Edith Eger wanted Andreas and ANYONE carrying the guilt of having ancestors involved in the Holocaust, the apartheid, the Rwandan genocide, any other genocide or instance of systemic injustice and violence, to know:

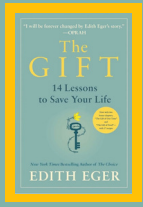
"It wasn't you. Assign the blame to the perpetrators, and then decide (...): Do you want to stay beholden to the past? Or can you find a way to release your loved ones—and yourself?"

During that trip, our author also realized that her daughter, Audrey had been greatly affected by questions she didn't know how to ask—nor was sure she could handle the answers to. Indeed, she didn't know what to do with the feelings which arose when she connected with her mother's story. She also wondered how it had affected her, her DNA, and how it could affect her children. She avoided the Holocaust in conversations as well as in books, art or any related events.

Edith Eger writes:

"When we carry a difficult legacy, we often react in one of two ways: we resist it or detach from it; we fight it or run away."

And she then describes how Audrey and Andreas were facing the same challenge, even though they were on opposite sides from this tragedy: how can we reckon with a brutal truth and then hold it and carry it forward., even though they were on opposite sides from this tragedy: how can we reckon with a brutal truth and then hold it and carry it forward.



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Another key defining moment on the author's path to understanding the broader impact of legacy was when a 14 yo boy came to see her for a court-appointed therapy session. He had joined an extremist group and shared right away his beliefs that anyone who wasn't white shouldn't be allowed to stay in America (or even to stay alive). At first she felt compelled to strangle him, but then she gave herself the most powerful advice:

"Find the bigot in you."

It took her a minute to be able to digest her own thought but soon she recognized that:

"To stop bigotry means you start with yourself. You let go of judgment and choose compassion."

She then decided to take a deep breath and to give the tiniest gesture of acceptance she could muster. Acceptance of his humanity, not of his ideology. She asked **"Tell me more."**

She learned about the severe neglect and lonely childhood he had experienced and understood that he had not joined this group because he had been born with hate. He joined in a desperate attempt to meet those core needs we all share: acceptance, attention, affection. She also recognized that attacking him would only have fed his feelings of unworthiness and make things even worse! She took the opportunity to show him another version of what a refuge or belonging can look like.

By replacing judgment with compassion, she could recognize their shared humanity and practice love. Reflecting on the rise of fascism all over the world, she shares:

"In this state of fear and vulnerability, it's tempting to hate the haters. But I feel sorry for people who are taught to hate."

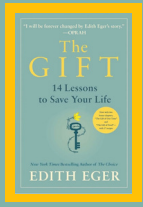
She urges us to remember that:

"We are not all descendants of Nazis. But we each have a Nazi within."

This inner Nazi is the part of us that withholds compassion and resorts to judgment. That part that victimizes others when things don't go the way we want and that cuts us from our right to be free.

"Freedom means choosing, every moment, whether we reach for our inner Nazi or our inner Gandhi.

For the love we were born with or the hate we learned."



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She remembered when she had judged some women in a country club because of how superficial and rich they looked... She recognized that she had fallen into that us-versus-them mentality that had killed her parents and chose to open her hearts instead. That's when she realized that she had just met fellow deep thinkers who had also experienced difficulty and pain.

"When we live in the prison of judgment, we don't just victimize others. We victimize ourselves."

Edith Eger reminds us that:

"We're all victims of victims. How far back do you want to go, searching for the source? It's better to start with yourself."

By relinquishing our inner nazi, we can free ourselves from the internal and external forces that hold us back. She shares Alex's story and how she had learned to expect the worst of people as a child, when she had to constantly weather her father's anger while believing it was her fault he was so unhappy. By watching him disparage everyone he met, she started assuming assuming that everyone else was ill-intended towards her too. She found reliefs from her inhibitions and fears in alcohol and could function better for a while! Until it led her to rehab. Self-kindness was actually the antidote she was looking for.

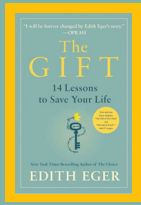
Edith Eger invited her to recognize that half of her was indeed her father and that she could choose to wrap him up in light, instead of letting hate win the debate.

That's how our author survived in Auschwitz. By turning her hate into pity. Pity for those brainwashed guards whose innocence had been stolen by hate and who had lost their freedom forever, whereas she could still reclaim hers.

Audrey and Andreas are now using their origin stories to help business leaders focus on their inner healing so that they can face their past and build better futures for all of us. She highlights that owning and sharing our stories, and that turning our pain into wisdom is not only how but WHY we heal. We heal ourselves and then we get to share what our healing creates for the world.

"We're born to love; we learn to hate."

It's up to us what we reach for."



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

- **Our best teachers:** Those obnoxious, so-called toxic, people we encounter can become our best teachers if we remember that they are “Human no more, human no less. Human, like me” and ask ourselves what they came to teach us.
- **We're born to love, we learn to hate:** Let's make a list of all the messages we received growing up that created categories within people. Let's check the impact they had on us and our worldview and decide how we want to proceed going forward.
- **What's the legacy you want to pass on?:** We can't choose what we inherited, but we choose what we pass on. Let's write the recipe of a life well-lived so that our children can receive something delicious and nourishing to build their lives upon.