

# The GIFT



## BOOK DIGEST

### IF I SURVIVE TODAY, TOMORROW I WILL BE FREE

#### THE PRISON OF: HOPELESSNESS

Whenever she's feeling overwhelmed with hopelessness, Edith Eger recalls the powerful words her mother told her when they were on the train taking them to Auschwitz: **"We don't know where we're going. We don't know what's going to happen. Just remember, no one can take away what you put in your mind."**

She shares how she would portray her loved ones, her boyfriend and imagine their reunions to survive in the camp. It helped her see past her present circumstances and envision a future where love and warmth would replace torture and starvation. She writes:

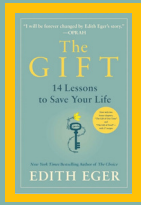
*"These thoughts were like a candle I held through the very darkest hours and months."*

It helped her ground in the belief that it was only temporary—and if it was only temporary, it was survivable.

**"Hope really is a matter of life and death."**

Our author then describes how committed she was to join Deepak Chopra for a live conversation about her first book, *The Choice*, and how that dream got derailed at the last minute, when instead of stepping on stage, she had to be taken to the hospital and rushed into the OR for a volvulus. When she woke up hooked to machines and with a tube in her throat, it spiked her PTSD symptoms. The feelings of being helpless and voiceless brought her right back to Auschwitz, and it got even worse when the nurses tied up her hands to prevent her from trying to pull the tube out. The next few days felt unbearable to Edith Eger. All she wanted was to die and she felt like no one understood the distress she was in. When her doctor finally told her he would take out the tube the next day, she held onto the thought **"it's temporary"** with all her might and it got her through the night! But the next day, she was told she would need to stay intubated for one more day. This time she didn't think she would survive the night... until she heard her inner voice remind her that she had survived Auschwitz, so she could survive this. She had a choice: **to give up or to choose hope**. And right away something shifted within her, reconnecting her to the love of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. She chose to live in that moment, because she remembered all that she had to live for. She writes:

*"When it's your time, it's your time. We can't choose when we die.  
But I no longer wanted to. I wanted to live."*



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*“Hope isn’t the white paint we use to mask our suffering.  
It’s an investment in curiosity.  
A recognition that if we give up now, we’ll never get to see what happens next.”*

She reminds us that choosing hope is choosing life. It does not guarantee that everything will be well in our futures, but it affects what we put our attention on each day. We can honor our loss and trauma and show up for the required healing work, while filling our days with passion. It’s not one or the other.

Edith Eger often gets asked how she can have hope when living in a world where genocides can still happen after the Holocaust. She explains:

*“To ask how hope is possible in the face of dire realities is to confuse hope with idealism. Idealism is when you expect that everything in life is going to be fair or good or easy. It’s a defense mechanism, just like denial or illusion.”*

Our freedom doesn’t come from cloaking reality with something sweet. She adds:

*“Hope isn’t a distraction from darkness. It’s a confrontation WITH darkness.”*

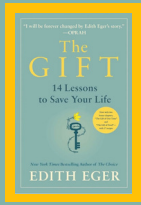
She tells the story of Ben Ferencz who is the last living person to have prosecuted Nazis at Nuremberg. He was the son of Jewish immigrants and served in the US Army during WWII. He was sent to concentration camps to gather evidence and thought he would never recover from what he witnessed there. And on top of that he then had to study the reports of millions of deaths, when he was recruited for the Nuremberg trial. He shared that at 99 yo, he was still churning every time he thought about it all. But he didn’t fall into denial and resisted hopelessness. He used all he had witnessed as fuel during his career practicing the law and remained an advocate for peace and social justice until his dying day.

*“Hope is the conviction that you survived all that you survived so that you can be a good role model. An ambassador for freedom. A person who focuses not on what you’ve lost, but on what’s still here for you, on the work you’re called to do.”*

We will never forget the most traumatic events of our lives but, she reminds us that:

*“What we call PTSD is not a disorder—it’s a very normal reaction to loss, violence and tragedy.”*

But we can come to terms with anything that happened, thanks to hope. Because hope allows us to use everything that happens as a catalyst and fuel for growth and purpose.



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“Hope doesn’t obscure or whitewash reality.

Hope tells us that life is full of darkness and suffering

—and yet if we survive today, tomorrow we’ll be free.”

**And here are this chapter’s KEYS to free ourselves from hopelessness:**

- **Don’t cover garlic with chocolate:** Pretending our pain away doesn’t build resilience or provide freedom. Let’s check our self-talk for any denial, minimization, or delusion and replace them with “It hurts. And it’s temporary”. Let’s then remind ourselves that we’ve survived pain before.
- **It takes courage not to be discouraged:** Let’s list everything we can think of that is BETTER today than it was five years ago, in the world first and then in our personal experience. Set a timer and give yourself 10 minutes of free writing.
- **Hope is an investment in curiosity:** She offers us a visualization exercise, which starts in a meditative state. We can then imagine walking on a path leading us to a doorstep where we’ll be met by our future self. After noticing where we happen to be walking, what are the sights and smells and then how the door looks like and where it leads, we can ask our future self, “What do you want me to know?”