

**RESILIENCE:
HOW TO LIVE WITH AN OPEN HEART IN A
TROUBLED WORLD**



**Maya Kollman
Imago Days April 2022**

SURRENDERING TO LOVE: THE KEY TO LIVING A RESILIENT LIFE

When I was young, I thought death took courage. I was wrong. Dying may take courage, but death requires little courage at all. It is love that requires courage, because people we love most may die before we do. Dare to love and we instantly become vulnerable, a word that means, "susceptible to being wounded". Our partner struggles for life in a hospital, or our son risks his in a distant land. At such moments the courage to love is nothing less than the courage to lose everything we hold most dear. Love another with all our heart and we place our hearts in jeopardy, one so great that the world as we know it can disappear between the time we pick up the telephone and when we put it down. Love is grief's advance party.

*Every time we give our hearts away, we risk having it dashed to pieces. Fear promises a safer path: Refuse to give away your heart and it will never be broken. And it is true, armored hearts are invulnerable. We can eliminate a world of trouble from our lives simply by closing our hearts. Yet the trouble from which we are liberating ourselves is necessary trouble. We need it as we need breath. Since the most precious and enduring lifework is signed by love, to avoid the risk of love is to cower from life's only perfect promise. **Forrest Church from Love and Death***

INTRODUCTION

Right now, as we sit here at Retter, comfortable, feeling a sense of belonging, safety and comfort, millions are displaced, millions are hungry and frightened. Sometime the helplessness I feel is overwhelming. What can I do? How can I help? How do I have the right to feel joy when so many others are suffering?

It helps me to remember lessons I learned from my parents. They were refugees from Nazi occupied Austria. They lived through the Anschluss when Hitler marched in on my father's birthday, March 12th, 1938. My father was one of the Jewish men who was herded into the main Synagogue in Vienna after Kristalnacht and told the soldiers would burn it down with them inside. Another time my father was crammed into the Lippizaner horse arena along with hundreds of Jewish men for days. He escaped only because one of his students was an SS soldier who loved him and got him out. My parents lost their home and eventually their country. They lost family members and friends. And yet...They both made the decision that since they had been given the gift of life when so many perished, it was their job to guard against hate by putting as much love in the world as they could. And that is what they did. In the little town of Mt Vernon, Iowa, USA where they settled, they were beloved because they reached out, were kind and loving, and they contributed even when they had so little. They faced this new experience that was so foreign to them (No rye bread, no good cheese, no other Jews!) with open hearts.

In their memory, I wake up every morning and say to myself, "Let me choose love over fear more of the time". Sometimes I can do it, and sometimes I can't but that is always my intention. I do it for those around me, but I also do it for me. Living with a closed heart does damage not only to me, but also to those with whom I'm in relationship

My parents were able to recover from their multiple losses and go on to build a life full of meaning and purpose. This is RESILIENCE. Resilience is the ability to live through difficulty without becoming hard and angry. It is the ability to create a new life while embracing the pain of the hard times. Some people are lucky enough to be born with that capacity, but most of us need to learn how to become resilient and the good news is...it is available to anyone who wants to learn it.

So, in this brief time we have with each other, let's begin the process of creating resilience or if you are lucky enough to have it already to strengthen it. Resilience is not some abstract idea. It is a skill that can be cultivated and learned.

DYAD #1: My Experience of Resilience

As I am beginning to talk about my experience of the Guided Imagery, what I am experiencing is...(thought, feeling, body sensation).

Mirror Throughout

The incident I thought about was...

The grief I still feel about that incident is...

How I have practiced resilience since it happened is...

The resources I used that helped me to be resilient are...

The meaning of this incident for my life is...

How this incident has made me a better person/therapist is...

I believe my purpose in this life is...

What I appreciate about you is...

(Ask if your sender would like you to Validate and Empathize)

RESILIENCE RESEARCH

There has been considerable evidence about what helps people become resilient. Marty Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania coined a new Science: The science of Positive Psychology. In his research, he discovered there were three ways to help people become more resilient. Some people are born that way, but all people can learn resilience by doing the three following things.

1. Recognizing that shit happens. Suffering is a part of everyone's life. We all lose and hurt. Somehow, though, we guard against this idea and mistakenly ask the question, "Why me?". We need to ask, "Why not me" and recognize that all humans suffer.

2. Knowing what you can control and what you can't and what you can And what you can't change. In AA they have the serenity Prayer:
***Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can, And the wisdom to
know the difference.***

3. Asking yourself all the time, "Is what I am doing helping or harming me".

HOW IMAGO COUPLES' THERAPY PROMOTES RESILIENCE

As I began the study of Resilience, I reflected on how much of our theory is designed to create resilience not only in each person, but also in the couple, and in the relationship itself.

1. **Shit happens:** We work to help couples understand each other's pain and become compassionate. We ask them to take a 30,000 foot view of what is happening.

2. **Acceptance of what we cannot change and focusing on what we can:** We emphasize the importance of letting go of trying to change the other, but rather to focus on what they can do to help the relationship.

3. **Is what I am doing harming me?** We ask them to pay attention to their actions and ask, is this working to bring me joy, or I am behaving in a way that creates suffering?

A friend thought of this numeric for the elements that are essential for resilience: **GOALS PM**

G: Gratitude

O: Optimism

A: Active Coping

L: Love

S: Social Skills

P: Postive

M: Meaning Making

As Imago Therapists and Facilitators, we do this in every single session:

G: We use gratitude and appreciations. We stress the importance of focusing on the positive because of the negative bias of our brains .

O: We use Vision, Old Story/New Story/the idea of possibility to increase a sense of optimism.

A: We help couples through the dialogue find ways to manage reactivity by responding rather than reacting, we create active coping strategies.

L: We talk about Love as an action rather than a feeling. If we decide to love, we need to act in loving ways even when we don't feel like it.

S: We help couples to use connecting language, and to watch their body language and their facial expressions, thus improving their social skills.

P: We focus on the the positive. How our childhood adaptations kept us alive. How there are some adaptations that help us, and some that are no longer helpful. We see conflict as growth trying to happen, that conflict is a sign the couple is in a good place to grow.

M: We us the dialogue to help couples understand the way each of them makes meaning which gives them a chance to see their relationship and their partner with new eyes, thus creating positive meaning.

Seligman also stresses the importance of being with stress without it derailing us. We need to build our containers so we can manage stress. The dialogue constantly calls on both partners to face into the stress of their relationship and hold it so it can transform into something beautiful.

Another point the resilience research makes is that "Failure is not only an option, it is required to be resilient". We do this everyday in the office when we see ruptures as opportunities rather than catastrophes. We predict

“Failures” and help our couples learn from the experience by giving them a repair process. Every time we repair after a rupture using the dialogue, we strengthen the resilience of our relationship, learn more about each other, and therefore increase our level of intimacy.

Finally, resilience requires that we recognize we can only change our stories and our attitudes. We can not really change our external circumstances. Being able to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions is a hall mark of our Imago Work. We often ask “how did I contribute to the nightmare and how can I contribute to the dream”. Instead of blaming others and feeling like a victim, we encourage ourselves and others to focus on how we can respond to situations in a helpful way.

USING AWE AND WONDER TO ENHANCE RESILIENCE

My mother was a master at wonder and awe. Perhaps what made her resilient was her ability to appreciate the small things in life. A bird she saw on her bird feeder, a swim in the pool, a warm shower, a dog, a delicious meal, a flower, a sunset, her bed, her plants, and of course all her amazing friends. When you were with her you felt like you were the only person in the world. Her ability to listen, her curiosity about you, healed any feelings that you weren't important. I think that is why she lived so well and made it to 106 1/2.

In our busy lives, we often don't take the time to live in a state of wonder. If you are lucky enough to be around little children, you can take a lesson from them about noticing. Let's take a walk outside in silence for 10 minutes. As you walk, notice what you see, what you hear, what you smell, what you feel. Allow your senses to guide you. When a thought appears that is about something else, notice it and let it drift away. Come back to your senses. Take deep breaths. When you return write about your experience of awe and wonder in the space below. No one will see this. I won't ask you to read it. This is just for you to write down what you noticed and how the experience was for you.

WRITING ABOUT AWE AND WONDER ON YOUR WALK

AWE AND WONDER CONTINUED:

A KEY ASPECT TO BEING RESILIENT: MANAGING TRANSITIONS IN THE LIFE OF A COMMITTED LOVE RELATIONSHIP

Change versus transition: One of the important differences between change and transition is that change is about achieving a goal, while transitions begin with letting go of what no longer fits or is inappropriate for the stage of life you are in. You need to figure out for yourself what is no longer appropriate. William Bridges

As we all know, life is all about transitions, small ones and big ones. There is only one thing certain about life, things will change. As with all systems in nature, human beings go through periods of disintegration with the possibility of reintegrating at a higher level. Unfortunately, without the skill to understand the inevitability of transitions, humans often panic and let their fear drive them. Instead of seeing these transitions as a normal part of life, human beings think things are catastrophic and something is wrong with them or their relationship. This fear creates chaos and disconnection and can often lead to an end to a perfectly good relationship. Why does this happen? I believe it happens because in childhood no one really helps us deal with our emotions. Emotions are energy in motion and for a small child they can be terrifying and destabilizing. Without a confident, calm adult to hold the feelings with the child, the child reacts to the overwhelm by trying to avoid what they are feeling. They develop all sorts of mechanisms to not feel and these mechanisms and the lack of understanding about change is what keeps many people from living lives of purpose, joy and resilience.

Couples come together with a contract. It would be great if this contract were written down and agreed upon, but usually it is unspoken. Over the years together as one or the other person begins to enter a phase of transition, their partner can feel betrayed as if they had broken this silent contract. This contract, made at the beginning of a relationship, assumes both people will always feel the same and be the same. Clearly, if we believe transitions are inevitable, that is not true.

So what is to be done. As couples therapists and facilitators, we have the unique opportunity to help couples grow their containers and support each other as they travel through the transitions that occur. To grow, we must have a road map that includes ways to understand what is happening, dialogues

that keep us connected and help us understand each other, and information that can soothe the terror about transitions. We must help couples articulate the unspoken contracts they have been holding, so they can create a new contract together. Our vision exercise is one of the ways we can do that, but there is so much more.

To be able to navigate transitions well, we need to be able to travel together through three phases. **The first phase, “Saying goodbye to What has Been”**, is where we honor what has brought us this far, but recognizing it is time to let it go. This often happens when children go to school for the first time, or leave home, or there is a job change, or the family moves to a different city. The problem is not that these transitions are bad, but unless we manage them consciously, we risk becoming completely disconnected.

The **second phase, “Living with Uncertainty”**, is that space where we are no longer where we were, but have not yet landed where we are going. I like to think of it as stepping onto a boat. We leave the “safe and familiar harbor” and travel on water which is rocky and unpredictable. While we are traveling there may be storms, there may be no wind, it may be very hot or very cold. We need tools to help us support each other during this time of uncertainty. As we know the human brain longs to make meaning and to know, and we need to work together to calm our reactive brain knowing that all this is necessary to move to a different shore.

The third phase is “Landing at a New Beginning”. Once we arrive, there are the adjustments to the new life. These adjustments can feel both exciting and wonderful, but also scary because we don’t know yet how to manage the situation. We need to be able to talk about the excitement and the fear with one another so we can truly be present to our new experience.

The basic Imago Idea is that our committed love relationships are the most efficient (not the easiest) path to finishing childhood business and growing up. Why is this important? First so we can live a joyous, purpose filled life, but second so we can come out of our self absorption and contribute to the world that needs us so badly. We are perfectly matched to mirror our magnificence and the places where we need to evolve and rediscover who we were always meant to be. Our partner carries for us our lost parts and our denied and disowned parts. We are each other’s best teachers, but we don’t know that when we get together. And after a while the very things we loved about each other, begin to frighten us because those missing parts are missing for a

reason. We gave them up in childhood because they were not welcomed in our family. In fact when we expressed them, we often lost connection and love. Transitions are often a sign that these missing parts are trying to come into being. And unfortunately without knowledge and a way to talk and listen, we will resist the change. After all, no matter how bad the familiar is, it still feels like home.

Two of your colleagues Christine Simeoni and Gunther Walsh from Nieder Osterreich have created wonderful dialogues for these three phases to help couples work together to see the gold in transitions and traverse them together. Following, are my adaptations of their dialogues.

Dialogue One: Saying Goodbye to What has Been

Dialogue Two: Living with Uncertainty

Dialogue Three: Landing at a new beginning.

I encourage you to contact them to have them tell you more about their adventure. It is truly inspiring.

Christine: Christinesim@gmx.at

Gunther: Guentherwalsh17@gmail.com

Website: beziehungsentwicklung.at

DYAD #2: TRANSITIONS

Choose a new partner. Pick one of the three dialogues below to explore

1. Saying goodbye to what has been (page 16)
2. Living with uncertainty (page 17)
3. Landing at a new beginning (page 18)

Each of you in the dyad can choose whichever dialogue you want to do.

DIALOGUE ONE: SAYING GOODBYE TO WHAT HAS BEEN

As I am beginning to say goodbye and letting go of the old, what I am experiencing is...

Mirror Throughout

I am getting ready to say goodbye to _____, to make room for something new.
(Can be a way of behaving, a concrete activity or situation).

The reason this has been important in my life is...

How this has served me in my life is...

One reason I need to give this up is...

My fear of letting go of this is...

I need to say goodbye to this so I can say hello to...

What it has been like for me to do this process with you is...

(Ask if your sender would like you to validate and empathize)

DIALOGUE TWO: LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY

As I am beginning this dialogue, what I am experiencing is...

Mirror Throughout

What I need to say to become more present is...

As I am facing this time of not knowing what scares me the most is...

What living in the not knowing was like when I was a child was...

Based on that experience,
A story I tell myself that contributes to my fear is...

How I react when I am afraid is...

A new story I could tell myself about this current transition is...

A transition that I have managed well in the past that could help me believe my new story is...

The resources I relied on that helped me were...

When I tell myself the new story and remember the transition I managed well I can feel...

And then how I can be with you is...

What I feel as we finish this dialogue is...

(Ask your sender if they want you to validate and empathize)

DIALOGUE THREE: LANDING AT A NEW BEGINNING

As I am beginning this dialogue
what I am experiencing is...

Mirror Throughout

As I imagine moving into this
new chapter with you, what
I am feeling is...

What I am saying hello to in
myself is...

The lost part I am growing into
is...

As I reclaim this part, how I will
be different in my life and with you
is...

What I need from you to help
me grow is...

How I might get in my own way is...

The resources I can reach for when
I feel unsure are...

What I feel as we finish this dialogue is...

(Ask your sender if they want
you to validate and empathize)

changes things in ways we cannot begin to imagine. It means goodness is quantum. Even to help the small world helps. Even prayer, which seems to do nothing. Everything is connected.

But quantum is perhaps a little esoteric in our current condition. (Well, mine: I'm sure you're just fine.) I think infinitely less esoteric stuff at 68. Probably best to have both feet on the ground, ogle the daffodils, take a sack of canned good over to the food pantry, and pick up trash. This helps our insides enormously.

So Sunday I will celebrate the absolutely astonishing miracle that I, specifically, was even born. As Fredrick Buechner wrote, "The grace of God means something like, "Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you." I will celebrate that I have shelter and friends and warm socks and feet to put in them, and that God or Gus found a way to turn the madness and shame of my addiction into grace, I'll shake my head with wonder, which I do more and more as I age, at all the beauty that is left and all that still works after so much has been taken away. So celebrate with me. Step outside and let your mouth drop open. Feed the poor with me, locally or, if you want to buy me something, make a donation to UNICEF. My party will not be the same without you.

QUOTES FROM GUNTHER AND CHRISTINE'S PRESENTATION

*If you want to build a ship, don't start by gathering wood and cutting boards and spreading out the work, but awaken in people's hearts the longing for the great and beautiful sea. **Antoine de Saint-Exubery.***

*Only in the context of transition process do goodbyes have personal meaning and open the door to our own transformation. **William Bridges***

*What keeps us stuck: It's the internal things that really hold us to the past, and people who only deal with the externals who quit jobs, end relationships, move across country...but end up not being much different from what or who they were before. These people use change to avoid transitions. **William Bridges***

*As much as we want a new beginning, part of us resists it. As if we were taking the first step toward disaster. Everyone has a slightly different version of these fears and confusions but in one way or another they all stem from the fear that real change will destroy the old ways we have learned to equate "who we are" and "what we need". **William Bridges***

*New form emerges from the formlessness of the neutral zone and new life springs from the fallowness of the neutral period. We can support and encourage the process but we cannot produce results. All we can do is prepare and stay with what we are experiencing. **William Bridges***

QUOTES FROM MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING BY VIKTOR FRANKL

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.

Don't aim at success. The more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to see that in the long-run—in the long-run, I say!—success will follow you precisely because you had forgotten to think about it. Viktor Frankl

Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how'. Viktor Frankl.

But there was no need to be ashamed of tears, for tears bore witness that a man had the greatest of courage, the courage to suffer. Viktor Frankl

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true. Viktor Frankl

Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible.

In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.

For the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth - that Love is the ultimate and highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love.

Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self. Whether or not he is actually present, whether or not he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance.

I have termed this constitutive characteristic "the self-transcendence of human existence." It denotes the fact that being human always points, and is directed, to something or someone, other than oneself--be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself--by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love--the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.

It is not freedom from conditions, but it is freedom to take a stand toward the conditions.

Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it.

ANNIE LAMOTT ON RESILIENCE

I am going to be 68 in six days, if I live that long. I'm optimistic. Mostly.

God, what a world. What a heartbreaking, terrifying freak show. It is completely ruining my birthday plans. I was going to celebrate how age and the grace of myopia have given me the perspective that almost everything sorts itself out in the end. That good will and decency and charity and love always eventually conspire to bring light into the darkest corners. That the crucifixion looked like a big win for the Romans.

But turning 68 means you weren't born yesterday. Turning 68 means you've seen what you've seen—Ukraine, Sandy Hook, the permafrost... Marjorie Taylor Greene. By 68, you have seen dear friends literally ravaged by cancer, lost children, unspeakable losses. The midterms are coming up. My mind is slipping. My dog died.

Really, to use the theological terms, it is just too frigging much. And regrettably, by 68, one is both seriously uninterested in a vigorous debate on the existence of evil, or even worse, a pep talk.

So what does that leave? Glad you asked: the answer is simple. A few very best friends with whom you can share your truth. That's the main thing. By 68, you know that the whole system of our lives works because we are not all nuts on the same day. You call someone and tell them that you hate everyone and all of life, and they will be glad you called. They felt that way three days and you helped them pull out of it by making them laugh or a cup of tea. You took them for a walk, or to Target.

Also, besides our friends, getting outside and looking up and around changes us: remember, you can trap bees on the bottom of Mason jars with a bit of honey and without a lid, because they don't look up. They just walk around bitterly bumping into the glass walls. That is SO me. All they have to do is look up and fly away. So we look up. In 68 years, I have never seen a boring sky. I have never felt blasé about the moon, or birdsong, or paper whites.

It is a crazy drunken clown college outside our windows now, almost too much beauty and renewal to take in. The world is warming up.

Well, how does us appreciating spring help the people of Ukraine? If we believe in chaos theory, and the butterfly effect, that the flapping of a Monarch's wings near my home can lead to a weather change in Tokyo, then maybe noticing beauty—flapping our wings with amazement—

Well, how does us appreciating spring help the people of Ukraine? If we believe in chaos theory, and the butterfly effect, that the flapping of a Monarch's wings near my home can lead to a weather change in Tokyo, then maybe noticing beauty—flapping our wings with amazement—changes things in ways we cannot begin to imagine. It means goodness is quantum. Even to help the small world helps. Even prayer, which seems to do nothing. Everything is connected.

But quantum is perhaps a little esoteric in our current condition. (Well, mine: I'm sure you're just fine.) I think infinitely less esoteric stuff at 68. Probably best to have both feet on the ground, ogle the daffodils, take a sack of canned good over to the food pantry, and pick up trash. This helps our insides enormously.

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RESOURCES

BOOKS

Awestruck, John Paquette

Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl

When Things Fall Apart, Pema Chodron

Welcoming the Unwelcome: Pema Chodron

Comfortable with Uncertainty: Pema Chodron

Flourish, Martin Seligman

Authentic Happiness: Martin Seligman

*Standing at the Edge: Finding Freedom where Fear and Courage Meet,
Joan Halifax*

Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes: William Bridges

Healing through the Dark Emotions: Miriam Greenspan

Thank you so much for taking part in this experience. Remember what a gift you are to all the people you work with. Remember your magnificence and your uniqueness. Who you are in this form will never again appear in all of time, so make the most of this one precious life. At times of great stress, chaos and confusion, we can always choose to express love over fear. Many Blessings and wishing you a life with much joy and radiant health.

Alles Gutes und Liebes,

Deine,

Maya