

Life Transitions:

During our adult life we go through many periods of change and metamorphosis. Most people will go through at least three transitional periods in their adult life. These are times when you change from one kind of person to another. The causes of these transitions may be age, illness, life circumstances, trauma, or family change. Whatever the cause, the process of change is familiar to most people as it involves disorganization, death, and renewal. These three elements are fundamental to nature and are a central theme in mythology and religion.

One of the interesting things about transition is the way it descends on us unexpectedly. For example, the arrival of a newborn baby can cause a shock to the system for some couples with the loss of time and freedom associated with it. Many people who seek counseling are struggling to deal with life transitions such as:

- Coming to terms with leaving home for the first time
- Moving from being a dependent young adult to being an independent adult
- Getting married
- Having a child
- Turning thirty and leaving behind the freedom of youth
- Having children and others depend on you
- Being stuck in a job
- Losing one's job
- Being promoted and having to change priorities
- Adjusting to the death of a parent
- Adjusting to the death of a child
- Being separated or divorced
- Having to move home
- Leaving a job
- Being unemployed
- Getting old
- Being bereaved
- Coping with retirement
- Dealing with serious illness
- Adjusting to death

The list, as you can see, is endless but the challenge of dealing with transitions from one stage in one's life to another is universal and inevitable.

Most of the major family and life ceremonies recognize these facts as seen at christenings, weddings, and funerals. Families come together to either celebrate or grieve a life transition. Even the way we celebrate each person's birthday is not just an expression of appreciation but also an acknowledgement that change and growth are the essence of life. For these reasons special attention is often given when one achieves a new decade – be it turning 30, 40, or 50.

Psychologists suggest that life transitions involve three stages:

1. The ending of our old life that involves a letting go, disenchantment, and the confrontation with having to take off our old protective clothing.

2. The stage of feeling lost. This time is when you may feel you are wandering in the forest of life with no path. During this time you feel you are broken open, waiting for a new path to open up. This can be a worrisome time or a time of deep reflection.
3. The stage of new beginning when small events or changes begin to create new life or new possibilities. Opportunities begin to appear and the first shoots of new growth are apparent. One begins to take one's eyes off the past and now attends to the future that lies ahead.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said that

“It is not in his goals but in his transitions that man is great”.

If you are going through life's changes, try to see this not an unfair infliction but as part of the character of being human. What you are going through is portrayed in all great mythology, spiritual lessons, parables, and religions as the essence of life and the process through which we both discover and reveal our deepest character. And though transition periods can be scary, most people grow to identify these times as the most significant ones in their lives – times when they learned to be better people.

All of the great things that happen in your life happen after transition. Throughout all of nature, growth involves periods of transformation: things go slowly for a time and nothing seems to happen – until suddenly the eggshell cracks, the branch blossoms, the tadpole's tail shrinks away, the leaf falls. With us it is the same. When we go through transition it may feel like we have lost everything. However, if you wait you find that transitions clear the ground for new growth.

Whether it is the story of the passion of the Christ, or the enlightenment of the Buddha, or one of the classic fairy tales for children, they are all about the process of human change and the inevitability of transformation. As you sit and read this, as sure as day follows night, there is something stirring within you waiting to emerge.
