

## **Framing Change**

*By Rick Jackson, 2009*

*Fear not the strangeness you feel*

*The future must enter you*

*Long before it happens.*

*Just wait for the birth.*

*For the hour of new clarity.*

— Rainer Maria Rilke

*The only real prison is fear, and the only real freedom is freedom from fear.*

— Aung San Suu Kyi, Burmese opposition leader and Nobel laureate

*Fear is that little darkroom where negatives are developed.*

— Michael Pritchard

Change has a very predictable dynamic.

First comes the change itself. Something that was there, is now not there. While we can politicize the change (was I pushed or did I jump?) the reality is that the change has occurred.

Whether someone else initiated the change or whether we initiated the change ourselves does not really matter. Change happens. And when it does, things are not the same and they will never be the same again. Acceptance.

After the change happens there is a kind of neutral zone — this is the space or gap between the change or ending and the new beginning. In the practice of meditation it is referred to as the gap between the stimulus and the response. A subtle example is the tiny pause between the out-breath and the in-breath. It is called the “transition.”

Most people look for ways to avoid the transition and want to go right to the new beginning (or go back to the way it was). They do this because this gap is uncomfortable and it disturbs our thinking and feeling habits.

We will likely experience some level of anxiety in this gap and we have been socially programmed to avoid anxiety. (Of course neurotic anxiety and clinical depression which may sometimes be triggered by change can be debilitating and it is sometimes

necessary for medications or therapies to help reduce this to a manageable level as a temporary measure — however, these medications and therapies are not a substitute for coming to grips with the transition process itself). When we are in transition we are simply in the zone of unknowing and at the same time we are grieving the loss of what once was.

For example if we are going through a job change or a relationship ending we suddenly are without a career or spouse and our social identity has been disturbed. (This is a shock to the limbic system). The part of our identity that was the role we played as a boss or employee or spouse etc is missing. We can't even say for certain what we *will* do. We feel in a kind of limbo. This prompts us to ask questions such as “who are we?” What is our purpose? What has meaning for us now?

Change is *external* even if we have initiated the change. This means that we can be a victim of the change. Transition, on the other hand, is *internal*. We have a choice in the transition.

Change can also be seen as an adventure — an opportunity to learn about ourselves and to dig deeper in what our soul (“the soft animal of our body”) really loves. Adventures can sometimes be painful especially if we try to remain attached to the past. But they can also be wonderful.

How we undertake the transition will have a lot to do with the quality of the new beginning – and there *will* be one. Indeed one of the things we will realize is there can only be a new beginning once there has been an ending. Deep insights can be gained in the transition process. This is an ancient wisdom. To paraphrase James Allen (“As a Man Thinketh”), “circumstances do not create the man — they reveal him to himself.”

Another important part of the change dynamic is the new beginning. This is a creative process. Once again a choice exists. We can participate in the creation or we can just float around waiting for the new beginning to begin. Most people rush this part of the process — big mistake!!!

If we rush the new beginning we may very well repeat the behaviours of the old situation – this would be “new wine in old wineskins.” To paraphrase Einstein — “insanity is repeating the same thing and expecting a different outcome.”

Here is a check-list that can help you “check-in” with yourself in regard to how you are doing with the change process:

— What is the most important thing for you to let go of in this transition process?

— What other “losses” in your life may be amplifying the feeling of loss associated with this change?

— What are the signs of mourning that you notice?

— How can you strengthen your other compass points? (i.e. relationships, home, relationship with Spirit). Where is your true north?

— How are you tolerating the neutral zone — the space between the ending and the new beginning? What are you learning here? How are you taking care of yourself in this place?

— How much time are you letting yourself have for **you**?  
What can wait while you go through this?

— As you take stock or an inventory in this neutral zone what is it that you really want to do now – what is your heart's desire? What are your strengths and abilities? What do you need to learn? What are the resources you have to help you? What is your mood or temperament or natural inclination?

— How good are you at thinking outside the box? What is the most outrageous thing you could be doing with your career?

The KEYS to mastering the change process are:

(i) Showing Up

(ii) Being Present

(iii) Reaching out

(iv) Truth telling

(v) Letting Go of Outcomes!!!

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