

Leaving depression behind.

A Journey Into Myself.

Nathalie Khalaf
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intro.

For as long as I could remember my life had been 'perfect', or so it seemed. I 'thought' it was perfect. Anything to do with 'feeling' had become too hard to deal with and 'thinking' had become much easier to deal with. Little did I know that all that positive smiley energy I was admired for as a child and young adult would soon blow up in my face and cause the biggest internal rupture. That rupture would lead me to turn my life upside down. The bigger part of the first 36 years of my life had been a period of mental and emotional numbness. I could not wake up. I had dug a hole so deep for myself that I could not see my way out. This paper is about the inner journey I made into myself. It is about reaching a mental and emotional deadlock which caused me to 'fall deep into myself'. I had fallen so deep it felt like all my senses had gone numb. I could not feel or see or hear or taste life anymore. It was the accumulation of all of my issues uniting against me, to finally break me. It was the best thing that happened to me.

my happy life. the illusion.

For as long as I could remember my life had been perfect. So what if my parents fought a lot? So what if there were spells of ice cold silence in the house? So what if my mother had always been regarded as a foreigner and outsider? So what if they eventually split up and divorced? I was still fine. I was loved. I did okay at school. I had a lot of friends who loved me. I had a lot of nice and cool things. I could work through all of that. I learnt one had to be focused on positivity without lingering on the negative. Complaining didn't get me anywhere. Things were not transparent at home, I therefore learnt there were issues in life not to be discussed but just ignored. Why focus on the 'problems'? By turning a blind eye to what we did not like or understand, one could continue being happy. That's how one made friends. That's how one could be loved. That's how I would survive.

The two most scary experiences in my life were so hard to deal with that I chose what seemed at the time the 'easy' way out. *I chose not to deal with them.* The first of those experiences was not knowing how to deal with having to live without my mother which was devastating for a 12 year old. My sister and I were told not to discuss it with anyone and just say our mother stayed behind in Switzerland to look after my sick grandmother. None of which was true. Of course that didn't mean the truth was any easier, quite the contrary! How could I explain that my parents didn't love each other anymore, that my mother wasn't wanted as part of the family? The request of 'acting as if everything was okay' was much easier for me to deal with emotionally, back then. And so the lying and pretending began and it continued. The lying then turned into confusion; what was the truth? Who was telling the truth? Was my mother telling me the truth by sharing everything with me? Or was my father telling me the truth by keeping it all hidden?

Eventually, pretending everything was okay and not talking about anything, not discussing the emotions, became the norm. That pattern caught up with me in all aspects of my life, both socially and romantically.

The second scary experience was accepting and loving my self, fully. I knew at a very early age that I could not deal with being different. I did not have the courage to be different. I wanted to 'be normal' and just blend in and not be seen. I tried to 'fit in' but it didn't work so well. I got romantically involved twice, both times the experiences were beautiful and challenging. Eventually neither of my partners could handle the relationship and chose to end it. I was a mess. I did not know who to turn to and whom I could trust. The end of the second relationship was the breaking point in my happy illusion of a life. It was then that my rigidity was smashed to pieces and I felt deeply damaged. The only way to deal with it was again not to deal with it. I decided to run away from the pain and to run away from myself.

I was so desperate I went on medication. The tears were justified by lies and the pain was slowly stifled until my happy illusion of a life kicked back in. At that point, I had made up my mind to be happy and not to feel anymore pain. I did not know anybody else who had gone through similar experiences, perhaps it was abnormal. Perhaps I should just forget about that part of me and try to live 'a normal life'. At least I could 'fit in' and be like everybody else.

Things went back to feeling good. I felt the world was good to me, as long as I was good to the world and did what it expected of me. Sure there were occasions when I felt I couldn't go on but I told myself that was life. That was the way it was supposed to be - go on you can do it, in fact you have to do it, you have to fit in, you have to keep up, you have to go on, you have to never ever stop. Just keep running and don't look back, you don't have to deal with any of the past, if you ignore it for long enough it will all go away and evaporate into existence. So for the longest time I just kept running. I ran through my childhood. I ran through my teens and I ran through my twenties.

Then one day I tripped.

I could see the tip of a deep dark hole. It was so deep and so dark. So cold and so lonely. I could smell the stench of the past. I was falling. There was nobody to help me. I knew I just couldn't fall. I didn't have the time to fall. I had so much happening in my life. I didn't want to have to deal with anything, I didn't even know what was waiting for me down there. I could die of sadness and loneliness and nobody would know! The feelings of darkness were stronger than me. Gradually a close friend of mine noticed I had been crying all the time, hardly sleeping, hardly eating. She booked an appointment for me to see a clinical psychiatrist a few months after arriving in Dubai. I remember going to two sessions only. I remember just sitting there for the whole hour crying my heart out and feeling no compassion or empathy from the person in front of me. He prescribed medication from the first session which he said would help me deal with it all. On the prescription it listed how many grams for how long and suggested I could gradually reduce the dosage as we progressed in therapy after approximately 6 months. I got all that information and decided I'd spare myself the humiliation. I felt no empathy from him, no connection with him, and decided to just self medicate. After all it was all listed there on the note. And so I did. And thank God for those happy pills! Soon I was back on my feet again and carried on running. My beautiful happy life was back on track. My illusion was perfect.

I had everything I needed. A good job. A home. A car. Friends and more friends and more friends. Parties and fun. I was dating. It all felt so good and so 'normal'. It was what society dictated and I finally thought I fit in. But of course that was just because I was being everything everyone else expected me to be. I never cared about being me. It felt good to be accepted. It felt good being with someone. I kept on pushing myself all the time. I pushed myself to be happy. I pushed myself to keep on moving, to continue partying, to continue working, to continue trying to be happy, to continue trying to love, to continue talking and to continue laughing.

Then one day I woke up.

I realized I couldn't run anymore. I couldn't talk. I couldn't laugh. I couldn't function at work. I couldn't get up. I couldn't breath. I didn't want to love. I didn't want to laugh. I didn't want to fit in. I didn't want to pretend. I didn't want to go on living.

a dead end.

I was at the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico City. I saw in Frida an inspiring example of freedom of love and freedom of speech. Two qualities which took courage and strength. Two qualities I did not see in myself. It was there, in that museum, that I realized I had a great capacity to love, but had been denying myself the freedom to love and be loved all along.

I was at the Frida Kahlo Museum in Mexico city. I felt so sad. A wave of emotion was rising up inside of me. It suddenly hit me. I was standing at the edge of that same deep dark hole I so luckily avoided falling into a couple of times in the past. But how did I get here? Wasn't I in Mexico City having the time of my life? As I was thinking those thoughts I started feeling cold, I felt sad and lonely, I started crying. I thought of Frida, of her beautiful life, of her painful life, of her love and suffering. I thought of my mother and my father. I thought of myself as a child. I thought of all the pain on earth. Everything felt so painful. Everything felt so wrong. I felt the cold and the loneliness. I felt surrounded by darkness. I felt all alone. Where was I? I recognised the smell of old mouldy painful memories. I recognised this place! This was my abyss.

It felt like I couldn't hear a thing with all that screaming and crying. Where was all that noise coming from? It was all coming from inside me! It was my inner child screaming out my pain! This place is scary, and I am all alone, it is so painful and so dark I can't see a thing. I don't know how I am ever going to get out. I don't want to stay here, I'll never survive it.

me, myself, my mask and i

I spent a long time in that abyss, all by myself. I was lost to the world and the world felt lost to me. There was nobody I could communicate with so, finally, I had to communicate with myself. My communication took the shape of tears. I cried over my mother and father. I cried over my childhood. I cried over my life. My beautiful happy life! Or was it? It wasn't really. It never was! Now I had nothing else to do but face it all. Face all of my darkest fears. I could no longer escape anything. It seemed to me like I cried forever. I finally cried over my parent's fighting and the endless screaming in the house. I cried over their separation and their divorce. I cried over my life as a child without my mother near me - but miles and miles away instead. I cried over the stress and fear and loneliness I felt all around, at home with my family and at school. I cried over my mother who also suffered and was all on her own, ripped away from her children. I cried over my father who had lost his partner and was suffering all on his own. I cried over all the lies I lived. I cried for the lack of truth in anyone around me. I cried for myself, the child in me who was so scared and alone and never really expressed herself. I cried for my younger sister who was all alone with an older sister who did not know what was going on. Nothing was right. Nothing was beautiful. Nothing was perfect. I cried for myself and I cried for the world. All of a sudden my beautiful illusion of a life was nothing but a deep dark abyss of pain. It was like I had been living a fake existence.

I met my Mask.

I was so tired. I did not want to pretend to be happy anymore. I did not want to cry either. I did not want anything. I did not want to die and I did not want to live. I just wanted to be left alone. I did not want to speak or listen. Even breathing seemed like such a hard task. I was so tired from running around trying to please everyone all the time,

my parents, my family, my school, my friends, my society, MY FALSE SELF. I realized I had been living my life for everyone else but myself. I was tired because I wasn't allowing myself to feel anything. I wasn't allowing myself to be ME. Just ME. I could not do it anymore, I could not live for anyone else. I needed to live for me or not live at all. I was scared. I was scared to be different and to stand up for what I wanted. I was scared to speak up for what I believed in. What if nobody ever loved me again.

My time in the abyss alone made me realize I was marinating in my own fears and loneliness. This was the lowest point I ever got to - there was nothing worse than this but I was still breathing. My closest friends saw me wither in front of them. I realized I needed help - I refused to go and see another psychiatrist or psychologist - it needed to be a different kind of help. One which was not attached to science and detached from emotions. One which wasn't attached to logic and chemical solutions, but attached to the whole of Creation and to the connectivity of souls.

It was during that time I came across the holistic studies course. I had heard of Munira through a friend and she became the voice and the light that would help me climb out of that deep dark hole. I was filled with fear, despair, hopelessness, anger and guilt. It was very hard at first to stay focused on me and my responsibility and the role I played in my own misery. It was hard to dig through all that sadness to find the hidden layers of anger. Anger so hard to face because it was anger at the people I loved the most in life; my parents, my family, myself and my lovers. My studies introduced me to: our masks, our shadows, our lower selves and our higher selves. I slowly learnt to unearth hidden truths about my childhood and teens, hidden truths about my own sexuality and how I functioned as a human being. I learned how, as a child, I had created false images about life and people which turned into a distorted belief system, and how that system shaped my world. I was lost in a mayhem of patterns which drove and controlled my relationships and life situations. I learnt I had to start by taking responsibility for my choices. I suffered from major anxiety, fear, loneliness and depression. I would spend most of my nights sleepless and in tears. The world seemed empty. The mosque next door with the echoing call for prayers bounced off the walls of my bedroom. It felt like I was all alone in the world.

During the first two years of the course and digging through the layers of my own abyss I met someone. Our relationship was one full of blame, anger, tears and pain. Needless to say our relationship only lasted nine months. I was in such a raw state it felt my life was like a game of 'snakes and ladders'. As soon as I got somewhere I would hit the head of a snake and slide all the way back down again! How was the universe having such a laugh at my expense. My inner vision felt blurry and my emotions confused. I did not understand how we took turns to be our parents and child selves. It was after many sleepless nights full of tears and long days of bringing the anger out - that I realized my partner was my mirror. I realize now that my relationship made me really 'live' the experience of what I was learning during the first two years of the course. It helped me bring out the good, the bad and the ugly in me. My partner was both my inner child and my parents at the same time. We continuously switched roles of parent and child. I hated what I was in that relationship. I felt it brought out the worst in me.

I met my shadows.

It was many months after our breakup that I could look back at that relationship and be thankful for everything my partner had helped me see, truly see with my eyes, my heart and my mind. I was back up on the ladder again and I was set on getting out of this state of darkness! I learnt my life was the result of all the choices I had been making. I then realized I was going to be my own way out of where I was. After so much anger and pain and tears I eventually -

and with great difficulty - managed to feel compassion for myself. How could I be compassionate towards others when I wasn't at all compassionate towards myself. I started connecting to my inner child who was so well hidden away and scared. We started talking. I learnt about myself. The abyss was taking me to deeper darker lonelier levels. But now I knew where I was and what was happening. I was still afraid - but I was ready to face it all. I learned to love my inner child and forgive her for all her expectations and fears and demands of life and people. I learned to listen to her. She became my friend and I became hers. Slowly my abyss didn't seem so lonely anymore. It seemed less and less scary. It felt okay to be down here. I decided to face my fears and the first one was to come face to face with who I was. During my stay down in my abyss I was surrounded by my closest friends. They looked after me with love and compassion. They were the first ones I would talk to, they made it so easy. I felt supported and loved and never judged. I stumbled across several snake heads on my journey! Colleagues and random people would mirror back all of my existing doubts and fears. I kept sliding down those snakes to the bottom again.

Then one day I felt a shift. I got up realizing that at the bottom of one of those snakes was a cross road: I could choose one path, the safe path, which led me straight into a nice big solid closet full of all kinds of masks where I would be safe from judgement and hatred. Or I could choose the other path which meant I would give up lies for good and set myself free. And that was the path I would go down hand in hand with who I was. My real true self. There was going to be no more hiding or running away from myself. And that was the path I was ready to take. After many months of anger towards those who mirrored back my fears I realized the universe had sent them as a 'gift'. I realized they had helped me connect to the courage within me, and I thanked them.

climbing out.

It was all fine and good, but I still did not want to completely give in to my deepest darkest fears and anxieties. I still could not completely 'feel' all alone. Then the summer came when I had no choice. The universe just said 'deal with all your fears and anxieties and deal with them now'. I had no work. My friends were out of town. Any activity I tried to do was either cancelled or unavailable. The road ahead seemed full of snakes. I realized the universe was telling me to just *give in, to let go and to accept*.

I finally did. That phase did not come by so easily. It was again filled with many lonely empty days and sleepless tearful nights. I was united with my anger, my frustration and my loneliness. I remember looking up at the sky one evening and saying out loud:

"Okay, just bring it all on. Let me embrace my loneliness and sit down with all my fears once and for all."

That was a long and hard summer. I remember being very lonely and tired. I had daily anxiety and panic attacks. The summer seemed to go on forever.

Then one day I could not remember what it was I had to deal with?! Where did all that fear and loneliness go? I was still alone but I did not feel the least bit lonely. My anxiety and panic attacks were at a peak during that summer of 2012, but then got dissolved with an energy healing offered by a good friend of mine. I have not had a panic attack since.

It was hard, at first, to accept that I was responsible for my life and my own misery. It was hard to accept the role I played in my relationships. It was hard accepting I was good at playing the victim, blaming the world for my unhappy life. It was hard to accept my life just as it was and not the way I wanted it to be. I wanted to be in control and I wanted

things to be my way. I learnt about my hatred. I hated things not going my way. I hated my job. I hated people. I hated the world for not fitting the image I had in my head. I hated my life and hated my choices.

I met my lower self.

I learnt I could not blame the world for my misery and life situations. I learnt that I could take things into my own hands. It was hard connecting to all those layers of anger within me and to express them in order to let go and let the light in. That same summer when all I could do was just let go of my *illusion of control* is when I finally accepted that God, the Universe and Life had other plans for me. I decided from my heart to allow what was, to just be. That was the most difficult task and the most rewarding of all.

The more I accepted and loved, the more the abyss seemed to disappear. Suddenly I was out! I was out of my deep dark hole. I realized that deep dark hole was in fact a fabrication of my own mind, so big and powerful it had allowed me to be sucked in and cease to exist.

One day I woke up and things were okay. Life was beautiful. My tears had washed the pain away. I was filled with a beautiful sense of peace I had not experienced before. I felt so solid like my feet really had grown roots deep down into the core of the earth. I felt a pure and clean kind of love. Fresh and undemanding. I felt free to love and happy to love.

I met my higher self.

I realized I had driven myself to a breakdown. I had pushed myself off an edge and into my own deep dark abyss. What was I going to lose? It couldn't really get any worse. I decided to work hard on myself. It was going to be now or never! The hardest part was facing all of my past. Learning about my mask shed so much light on my own misery which I blamed on others. I slowly learnt to love and accept everything about myself which was something I had never done before. I learnt to sit with my feelings and allow my emotions to flow out of me in a river of tears. I realized we were all special in our own way. Each and every one of us was a butterfly waiting to emerge from its cocoon. We all have to realize our pain, admit it and embrace it. Our pain which is custom-designed for us, is the key strength on our individual journeys. It is our pain which gives each of us our colours, our character, our strengths and our individuality.

I learnt to love and accept myself. I realized that by just accepting myself everything else would fall into place. There was no fight to fight. I had my own life ahead of me to create. I was finally on my own two feet and learning to live my authentic self for the first time. I realized the difference between alone and lonely. I was standing alone but I wasn't lonely anymore. It felt good to be alive.

Learning about my Higher Self, my Lower Self, my Shadows and my Mask was one of the most eye-opening and cherished experiences throughout my journey, as was learning about my defenses. I can see how in denying my hate, anger, jealousy and laziness I had created the abyss. I felt the need to be good and the need to please. I allowed myself to hate with passion, I felt tons of jealousy, I despised and wanted to inflict physical pain. I wanted to hate. I loved to hate! I was so happy being lazy. I was happy being everything I didn't want to be. It felt so refreshingly free and good to allow myself hatred and anger towards those I loved the most. It was only after that, that I felt the love I had for them was stronger than it had ever been before.

conclusion. stepping out of the illusion and into my life.

Twelve years ago I reached a dead lock. I had dealt with depression three times in my life, each time saved by happy pills - or so I thought. For so many years I had denied the connection my inner child was trying to make with my adult self. I overlooked the base of my emotional stability and tried my best to deny its existence, not knowing how important it was for my wellbeing. Those same emotions eventually caught up with me and pulled me down into the darkness of my own being. That dark hole, was the deepest of everything I had allowed myself to feel in all of my life. At the age of 36 I had reached the peak of my despair. I went from being a mad extrovert not connected to anything - to a dark introvert feeling every cell in my body - and every cell of my body felt saturated with sadness and despair.

I will always remember the saddest and loneliest time of my life as the best thing that happened to me. It led me to my inner light and eventually my own salvation.

I now feel a beautiful solid peace throughout my self which I had not experienced before. Through the work I have done on myself and my self discovery, I realize this is just the beginning of a life long journey. I feel capable of a bigger and better quality of love towards myself and the world. It is the knowledge of my self and my psyche that is what I cherish from this journey. I was lost all those years because I hid behind a mask. I realize that the most important person I have met in the past twelve years is myself. We have become friends and now I know that even through any hard times ahead I will always be okay.

I would love to reach out to anyone going through the pain of depression and tell them that, yes it is a struggle, but that it is a phase we go through when we deny ourselves the expression of how we feel. When we suppress our emotions. It is certainly not who we are nor what our lives will be. Depression is a lonely, harsh cold place, but drugs are not the way out. Learning to love and fully accept ourselves is.

It is through our deepest pain that we can heal ourselves and the world around us.