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When You're in Transition

By James E. Miller

*What we call the beginning is often an ending
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.*
—T.S. Eliot—

The beginning of any human transition is not really a beginning—it's an ending.

That may be obvious to you, especially if the change you're facing
limits you or hurts you or devastates you.

When that happens, you realize you cannot have what you once had,
you can no longer do what you once did.

Something is gone from your life.

It's possible what's ending may be less than obvious—
it may take you awhile to see it.

Or, if the change is one you're looking forward to,
you may not be expecting any endings at all.

But they're there, just the same.

Endings come in many forms.

Someone you love may have died, or perhaps it was a relationship that died.

You may have lost some part of yourself—

your physical health, your emotional well-being, your spiritual wholeness.

You may be leaving behind your job, or your home, or your family,
or something else that has given your life structure and meaning.

You may be called upon to say farewell to your innocence or security,
your hopes or dreams, your past or future.

Endings do not arrive alone; they are accompanied by feelings.

Whether the loss is minor or major,

whether its effect is fleeting or enduring,

the result will be the same: a sense of grief.

Every person grieves differently, so your way will be like no one else's.

It would not be unusual, however,
for you to experience shock or numbness at first,
especially if yours is a massive or sudden change.
Sooner or later you may feel sad or depressed.
You may be anxious or fearful.
You may be slightly irritated, or really infuriated,
or something between those two.
Other feelings are also common: loneliness, tiredness, guilt, shame.
Opposing responses are quite possible: relief, gratitude, joy, love.
Your emotions may come and go quickly and unpredictably,
or they may settle over you and refuse to leave.
You may find that you respond more strongly than you expect.
Or the opposite may happen: you may respond hardly at all.
Your best route is *through* your endings, not around them.
Your best chance is to express your feelings, not hide them or hide from them.
This idea may seem unusual or unwise,
since it runs against popular conceptions—
the conception, for instance, that gaining is necessarily better than losing,
or that progress is always and only a movement upward,
or that a life of happiness has no room at all for sadness.
You are being given the opportunity to learn and show otherwise.
Whatever your emotions,
there is great value in honoring them by expressing them.
By speaking them to a confidant or a group of people you trust,
you can gain perspective and receive support.
By putting your feelings in writing, or to music,
or on canvas, or into some other action,
you can release a powerful energy,
and you can also *be* released *of* that energy.
This is not a subject purely for classroom study—
your very life is your classroom,
your experience is your teacher, and your learning is in your living.
Some call this method “trial and error,” but that’s less than true.
It’s really “trial and error, then trial and success.”

*Jim Miller has written in detail about the other parts of the transition process in his book, **Welcoming Change: Learning to Manage Transition in Your Life**. This book also contains many pages of his photography from the seasons of the*

*year, quotations from the ages supporting his ideas, and practical suggestions for going through every part of the transition process. There is also a related videotape entitled, **Nothing Is Permanent Except Change**. More information about these and other resources is available [here](#).*

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