

A woman with long dark hair is sitting on a dark wooden floor, leaning against a textured grey wall. She is wearing a light-colored plaid shirt and blue jeans. Her head is buried in her arms, which are crossed over her knees, suggesting a state of deep distress or depression. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

Leaving DEPRESSION Behind

A JOURNEY INTO MYSELF

"FOR AS LONG AS I COULD REMEMBER MY LIFE SEEMED 'PERFECT'. OR SO I 'THOUGHT' IT WAS. ANYTHING TO DO WITH 'FEELING' HAD BECOME TOO HARD TO DEAL WITH. LITTLE DID I KNOW THAT ALL THAT POSITIVE ENERGY I WAS ADMIRING 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 INSIDE OUT. MOST OF MY LIFE HAD BEEN A PERIOD OF MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL NUMBNESS. I REACHED A MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL DEADLOCK WHICH CAUSED ME TO 'FALL DEEP INTO MYSELF'. IT FELT AS IF 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." – NATHALIE KHALAF.

I never learnt to love my Self. My relationships fell apart and I was a mess. At 28 I got to the breaking point of my happy illusion of a life. It was then that my rigidity was smashed to pieces. The only way to deal with the pain was, again, not to deal with it. I decided to run away from it and to run away from myself.

MY HAPPY LIFE. THE ILLUSION.

For as long as I could remember my life had been perfect. So what if my parents fought or had spells of silence at home? So what if they got divorced? I was still fine. I did okay at school. I had a lot of friends. I had a lot of nice cool things. I learnt one had to be positive and not linger on the negative. Complaining would get me nowhere. Things were not transparent at home, so I learnt there were issues in life not to be discussed but just ignored. By turning a blind eye to what we did not like or understand, we could be happy. That's how one made friends. That's how one could be loved. That's how I would survive.

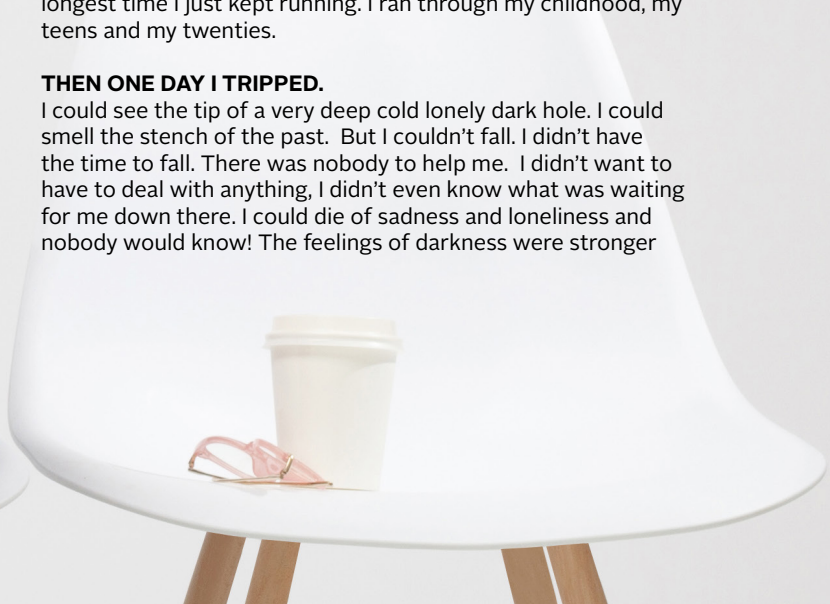
One of the scariest experiences in my life was so hard to deal with that I chose what seemed at the time the 'easy' way out. I chose not to deal with having to live without my mother, which was devastating for a 12-year-old. My sister and I were to discuss it with no one. That didn't mean the truth would have been easier to face. Quite the contrary! How would I explain that my parents didn't love each other anymore? To 'act as if everything was okay' was much easier to deal with emotionally. And so the lying and pretending began and it continued. It turned into confusion; what was the truth? Pretending everything was okay and not discussing the emotions, became the norm. That pattern caught up with me in all aspects of my life.

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I was so desperate that 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. I had made up my mind to be happy and not to feel any pain. I felt the world was good to me, as long as I was good to the world and did what it expected of me. 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, you have to do it, you have to fit in, you have to keep up, just keep running and don't look back'. So for the longest time I just kept running. I ran through my childhood, my teens and my twenties.

THEN ONE DAY I TRIPPED.

I could see the tip of a very deep cold lonely dark hole. I could smell the stench of the past. But I couldn't fall. I didn't have the time to fall. There was nobody to help me. 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. A close friend noticed I had been crying all the time, hardly sleeping, hardly eating and took me to see a psychiatrist. I remember sitting there crying my heart out and feeling no compassion or empathy from the person in front of me. He prescribed medication from the first session and said it would help me deal with it all. The prescription listed how many pills, for how long and suggested I could gradually reduce the dosage as we progressed in therapy. I decided I'd spare myself the humiliation, as I felt no connection with him, and just self-medicate. 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. Parties and fun. I was dating. It felt good. It was what society dictated and I finally thought I fit in. But 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, to keep on moving, to continue partying, to continue working, to continue being happy, to continue loving, 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 breathe. 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 then that I realized I 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 emotions was rising up inside of me. It suddenly hit me. I was standing at the edge of that deep dark hole I so luckily avoided 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 yet painful life, of her love and suffering. I thought of my parents. 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. Where was I?

I recognised the smell of old moldy 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 started communicating with myself. My communication took the shape of tears.

I cried over my parents. I cried over my childhood and my life. My beautiful happy life ... or was it?

It never really 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 divorce. I cried over myself as a child without my mother by my side - but miles away instead. I cried over the stress, fear and loneliness I felt at home and at school. I cried over my mother who also suffered, ripped away from her children. I cried over my father who suffered and had lost his partner. I cried over all the lies I lived and for the lack of truth in anyone around me. I cried for myself, the child in me who was so scared and never expressed herself. I cried for my younger sister who was all alone and did not know what was going on. Nothing was right. Nothing was beautiful. 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 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 made me realize I was marinating in my own fears and loneliness. This was the lowest point I ever got

heal



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to - there was nothing worse than this but I was still breathing. My closest friends saw me wither away. I realized I needed help. The kind of help which wasn't attached to logic and chemical solutions but based on the Wholeness of life.

It was during that time I came across a Holistic Counsellor. Munira 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 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 partners. My studies introduced me to our 'mask, shadow, lower and higher selves'. I slowly learnt to unearth hidden truths about how I functioned as a human being. I learned how, as a child, I had created false images about life and people. Those images turned into distorted beliefs, and those beliefs 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 spend most of my nights sleepless and in tears. The world seemed empty and I felt all alone.

During the first two years of the course, I was in a relationship. One full of blame, anger, tears and pain. I was in such a raw state that my life felt like a game of 'snakes and ladders'. Each time 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. I gradually realized my partner was my mirror. I hated what I was in that relationship for it brought out the good, the bad and the ugly in me.

I MET MY SHADOWS.

I learnt that my life was the result of all the choices I had been making, and realized I was going to be my own way out of where I was. I eventually managed to feel compassion for 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. I learned to love my inner child and forgive her for all her expectations, fears and demands of life and of people. I learned to listen to her. She

became my friend and I became hers. Slowly my Abyss didn't seem so lonely anymore.

On my journey random people continued to mirror my inner fears. Until one day I felt a shift. I realized I was at a crossroad: I could choose the safe path which would supply me with many masks and where I would be safe from judgement and hatred. Or I could choose the path of self-truth which meant I would give up lies for good and set myself free. 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. After many months of anger towards those who mirrored back my fears, I realized the universe had sent them to me as a 'gift'. I realized they had helped me connect to the courage within me. I thanked them.

CLIMBING OUT.

I was still struggling with my 'aleness'. Then summer came and I had no choice. The universe said, 'deal with your fears and anxieties and deal with them now'. I had no work. My friends were out of town. Any activity I tried got cancelled. 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. I remember looking up at the sky one evening and crying: "Okay, just bring it on. Let me embrace my loneliness and sit down with my fears once and for all." I remember having anxiety and panic attacks daily. The summer seemed to go on forever. Then one day I could not remember what it was I had to deal with! Where had all that fear and loneliness gone? I was still alone but did not feel lonely.

It was hard to accept that I was responsible for my life and my own misery. To accept I was playing the victim, blaming the world for my unhappiness. It was hard to accept my life as it was and not the way I wanted it to be. I wanted to be in control. I wanted things to be my way. I learnt about my hatred. 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. It was hard releasing the layers of anger within, in order to let go and let the light in. That summer, when all I

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could do was let go of my illusion of control, was 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 rewarding achievement of all.

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

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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. 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 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 is custom designed for us on our individual journeys. It is our pain which gives us our strength and our individuality.

I learnt to love and accept myself and everything else fell 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 be my Self for the very first time. I realized the difference between alone and lonely. I was standing alone but I wasn't lonely. It felt good to be alive.

Learning about my higher and lower self, my shadows and mask was eye-opening. I realized how denying my hate, anger and jealousy had created the Abyss. 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 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 then 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.

Thirteen 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 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 not 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 which I had not experienced before. Through the work I have done I feel capable of a bigger and better quality of love towards myself and the world. It is the knowledge of my Self that is what I cherish most 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 thirteen years has been my Self.

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



NATHALIE KHALAF is a holistic wellness counsellor at Taabeer Personal Coaching Services. During the last eight years Nathalie has helped adults, as well as teenagers, overcome challenging issues which range from low self-esteem and anxiety in adolescents, to depression stress and relationship issues in adults.

Her personal journey led her across many years of digging into her psyche and understanding the whole, very sensitive, relationship the mind has with the emotions and the physical body. She continued with studies in anatomy pathology and physiology and became a master and coach in neuro-linguistic psychology. She continues building her knowledge and has recently earned a diploma in Chakra and Aura Healing and is an accredited member of the International Practitioners of Holistic Medicine (IPHM).

Nathalie now offers one on one sessions to help anyone better understand their issues and struggles and reach wellness and happiness in a holistic way.