

TRANSFORMING CRISIS INTO OPPORTUNITY

By Yehuda Tagar

"Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack

There is a crack in everything.

That's how the life gets in"

(Leonard Cohen, Anthem).

No one likes crisis. It is painful, it is damaging, it creates loss, it creates loneliness, it destroys life as we know it before we know what the next step is, it ends dreams, it shatters self image, it is the very opposite, of safety, safety-zone, security, comfort. We devote a lot of our time and energy to prevent the possibility of crisis and maximise comfort and security - the whole of western-oriented economy and social structure is devoted to it.

Yet crisis is the major opportunity for necessary change and development. We are born in crisis, we die in crisis, and in between the transition between many of our life-changing phases involves crisis. The embryo loses its natural environment when the baby is born. No oxygen arrives any more through the navel cord. The baby chokes, he experiences the danger of death. He does not know there is another way to breathe. No one told him. He just can't breathe. He becomes blue for lack of oxygen. Then he cries, then he breathes, then he becomes a living baby.

Founder of Gestalt Therapy, Fritz Perles called this crisis: "The Blue Baby". Every human crisis has an element of 'The Blue baby': the old way of surviving cannot work anymore. You think you will die. You as you are cannot make it. You as you are *have* to die. But there is another way to live. You do not know about it yet. You have to activate this potential other way to survive, and in order to do so – you have to change, you have to become another human being, the one you have never been before, the one that is the next stage of your development. Once you go through this change – you will not wish to be back where you were. The baby does not wish to become an embryo again. There is a world out there to discover and to act in. But the crisis has to come first. Seen from this point of view – crisis is a process of birthing one's higher potential through the material of one's old way of being. Potentially. Only potentially so.

Because a crisis can also destroy potential, life, opportunity, love, family, parenthood, livelihood, your home, your community, your country, your life itself. We in relative peace, security and prosperity in Europe and the West have the luxury of being able to work on personal, social, political, economic and personal development, on transforming crisis into opportunity for human development. Because we can do so – we should do it for ourselves and for advancing humanity. But I wish to remember, in speaking about crisis as an opportunity – the on-going crisis in many regions of the world in which war and crisis are disasters, from which new opportunities may only arise much later.

For us, relatively peaceful Europeans – crisis can be the most powerful opportunity for change and development. Ends can become a new beginning, but not by itself. An initiative is required in order to give a new meaning to the suffering inflicted by the crisis. I often work

with couples in crisis. Something from an old love story has come to an end. They cannot renew the original love, intimacy, communication, good will, motivation to stay together, relationship energy, trust. When the decision was made by at least one of them to separate – the striving is to separate humanly, minimising the cost to children and economy,, creating a new separated-based relationship and parenting contract. Very often, if the separation is successfully done – human communication between the partners improves remarkably, a development that became impossible while they were together. New life has been created for both of them, separately. Each one of them had to change in order to restart their life.

But when the wish of the couple is to recover from the crisis, to stay together and to renew and rebuild their relationship – then the dynamics of activating the hidden opportunity in the crisis becomes the only way forward. I often have to say to them both: “you as you are – you cannot make it. As you presently are – this is what you can create. But if you are willing to change individually – you will become, individually, an upgraded version of yourself. If you both do that – then, and only then – you can heal and re-create your relationship”. When they both take up this challenge – a new personal development takes place, leading to relationship counselling.

For that to happen each of them have to take personal responsibility for their own inner life. For conflicts are created together, but overcoming them depends on individual change. Automatic defensive reactions have to be acknowledged, owned and transformed; habitual unconscious projections they trigger in each other have to be acknowledged, owned, and transformed; an upgrade of communication must take place in both of them leading to hear what the other says. Not what you fear that the other say, not what you hope that they say, not what you assume that they say – but what they actually say and mean from their own point of view; expectations, manipulations and disappointments – must be replaced by clear, honest request and freely chosen offerings, as a basis for a new contract of relationship, which they might not have ever had before; forgiveness must be chosen and activated full heartedly, to be able to give themselves a new chance, to move on, to heal and to create new life; and gratitude and appreciation of each other has to be generated in order to allow love to be restored. By the middle of such a process, long before it has been completed (which is a life task) – both of them have changed. They have become, individually, the next version of themselves, the upgraded self, what we call in Psychophonetics in Slavonia: “Nova Ja”, the new ‘I’. The crisis has indeed become an opportunity. That is an ideal process of an achievement. It is possible. It requires skills and good will. It is a step in human conscious evolution.

But most often such teamwork in a relationship in crisis is not possible or not chosen. Then the individual is left alone to deal with the crisis. That is also possible, but it takes a special courage: the courage to go through emotional pain, embrace it, touch it, heal it and become one’s own healer. That is the opportunity hidden in a crisis. That is what happened to me in the crisis of the separation of my first marriage, many years ago. The separation was not my choice, it was imposed on me. We had two little children. Everything I had and was identified with was destroyed. I had nothing left to build on. It was a death process. It lasted for a few years. I had to let go of everything that was mine, to leave my community, the country of my birth, my family, my home, my children, my work, my life task as I knew it at that time, and, in order to give myself an opportunity to create a new life and a new destiny – I had to go away, to take hold of whatever was left of my wounded self – and to use it as a foundation for building a new life in a new country. That is what I did at a huge cost to my fatherhood and to my children. If I stayed in the middle of the ruins of my previous life – I

would become a ruin myself. I knew it for sure. I looked for a 'destiny hospital' for emergency healing. There was not any such hospital. I had to create it for myself with my own ten fingers. In that process of self healing – I became a healer. I used poetry, drama, primitive elements of existential processing, and, above all – facing my wounds daily and nightly, without trying to escape it. I developed 'self-empathy'. I became my own healer. That became the foundation of my life task: what I managed to do for myself – I managed to transform into a method of healing others, and later a method of healing I could start to teach> Psychophonetics. Primarily I managed to transform elements of drama into processes of self awareness and self transformation. I created a new method of healing, a new profession, a new curriculum for teaching this profession, a new social/cultural contribution. That would have never happened if not for my life crisis and my striving to heal from it. The crisis in my life story – indeed became an opportunity. But the cost of it was immense, the sacrifice in personal life, parenthood, family, security and comfort was huge. It seems to me that new creation requires sacrifice. Something has to die for something else to be born.

A mother in her mid 30's came to me asking for help, her life is in ruins. Her husband left her with no process about it, communicating to her only through lawyers, making demands on shared custody and financial support to be imposed through a court. She is devastated, in huge pain, in deep grief for the destruction of her family, dream of home and future, frightened, powerless and hardly coping with the basic task of life. She has no idea how to face the hostile process that is coming, no ground to stand on, no power to speak for herself. She wanted to be strong and true to herself in that court case that was coming, and to find an inner foundation to stand on for this new life that was imposed on her in the middle of the destruction of her family. I encouraged her to feel everything fully. There is no other ground to stand on in the middle of crisis other than the reality of your own soul, as it is. And when your soul reality is in severe pain – you have to own it. Feel it, acknowledge it, and start to heal it. There will be no other ground to stand on. So she did feel everything. Then I encouraged her to imagine standing in a distance, the woman that she wants to be in one week time in that court case, one week from that session. She could see her: strong, upright, grounded, dependent on no one's approval, taking full responsibility for her life, for her motherhood, standing and speaking for her rights, her heart strong and open. The picture was clear and real. I asked her to go to that place and become that woman. It took her a long time to fully become, in physical bodily gesture, that future woman. Her whole posture changed, She became practically taller, stronger, clearer, upright and relaxed. She practices in that position, looking everyone involved in the eyes, speaking her truth, angry with no one. From that position I asked her to look back at herself in the chair, where she was before, in the middle of agonising pain. She came closer. She could see that this woman was in devastating fear. She was a very young version of herself, a little child. She took care of that child. She reassured her that she does not have to be exposed to the hostility that is coming. She became her own self-parent. She became the woman that she never before managed to be. The crisis was becoming an opportunity in front of my eyes.

In Mandarin Chinese the word for crisis is WEI-JI. Wei means danger. Ji means a crucial moment of change. It does not mean opportunity, as some people assume, but a drastic change. That much is inevitable. The crisis does not become an opportunity automatically. Many personal crisis do not become an opportunity for change. People can get stuck in the trauma of the crisis and not heal and not move from it for many years. But the crisis CAN become an opportunity through conscious initiative, requiring a complete experience of the wound, the loss, the grief, the cost of it all, and requiring a new initiative to create a new

self. On that basis the crucial point of change, the 'Ji' – can become an opportunity for new creation of self.

Sometimes we have to have a crack in the old self in order to let the light of the potential new self to enter. In Psychophonetics, a teleological method of human development, we call it conscious evolution.