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Embrace Your Brokenness

Brokenness...we feel it most in the moments when we're curled up into ourselves, sobbing, begging the world/God/the Universe/or whoever—to make our pain and agony stop. It's the feeling in the pit of your stomach when you're crying so hard that all becomes silent as your tears fall into the darkness. It is in these times of despair that we face our brokenness. The *it* that cannot be fixed in our lives, the *what* that is forever destroyed, the *who* that will never return; the *I* that will never be the same. The feeling of brokenness entwines our hearts, minds and bodies into a singular vessel of absolute desperation. We believe we will never again be whole...

For as long as I've been a therapist, I've had a negative reaction to people referring to themselves as "broken." This is likely due to the many, many years that I've worked with survivors of sexual abuse and the context in which they refer to themselves as *broken*. I've encouraged them to see themselves as "bruised, but not broken." After all, bruises fade and the flesh becomes healed. Of course, survivors of abuse are not the only clients that I have that at one time or another have seen themselves as being **broken**. In fact, there have been countless people I've encountered feeling this way. Those going through a break-up or divorce; losing a job or their house; grieving the loss of a loved one; battling a disease; struggling with an addiction...the list goes on and on. There they sit before me, wondering how things will ever be the same; how will they ever get back to who they used to be? How can I help them fix what feels broken?

During recent struggles of my own, a friend sent me a copy of a story about the Hindu Goddess Akhilandesvari (pronounced: ah-keel-an-desh-va-ree). In Sanskrit, "Ishvari" means Goddess and "Akhilanda" translates to Never Not Broken*. Now, it's not important whether or not you believe in Hindu deities (or any deities for that matter). It's the story of Akhilandesvari that matters. What Her story tells is something so powerful, that it has forever changed the way I will look at this idea of "brokenness."

Admittedly, from the very start of learning about this Goddess from Hindu mythology, I loved the idea that there was a belief in a Goddess who was *always broken*. From my limited understanding, not only is she always broken, but it is from that very brokenness that she derives Her power. She tears Herself apart over and over again, such that She will never become a "perfect whole," and will remain in a constant state of mutability. In Her ever-changing form, She is limitless—She is free from burdens, routines, habits, etc. She is a creation of endless possibilities. Because of this constant metamorphosis, She has attained "liberation, from all the illusions of the ego" (Michelle Myhre). She has attained a freedom that we humans can only aspire to have. But I digress...

Let's get back to our cries for the excruciating pain and agony to stop, while we're balled up on the bathroom floor like Elizabeth Gilbert in her book *Eat, Pray, Love*. In those moments of unbearable pain, we must force ourselves to realize that the future we had envisioned for ourselves no longer exists. The expectations of what we thought would be are now meaningless. I know this sounds awful. It is awful. BUT, in the absence of what was, there is now space for the creation of a new vision for your future. You

are being given a **gift**: the opportunity to decide who you want to be and what you want to do—without the limitations of your past. However, with this gift also comes the demand that you must face your fears, in order to manifest this new self.

Life will always bring us new challenges, new adventures, new sorrows, new loss...it is inevitable. Because of this, we will again and again have to acknowledge that the life we envisioned has once again changed course, and so we must again break ourselves apart and recreate ourselves all over again to walk on the new, unknown path. We must face this unknown—as scary as it may seem, and accept it as inseparable from the gift we are being given.

And so, if you should find yourself paralyzed with fear and crying out for mercy or grace, while in a very dark place, my advice to you is this: Let yourself break. Let yourself completely fall apart. In that darkness—shout, cry, mourn, do whatever you must to acknowledge your truth. And when you feel that you've had enough suffering while digging around in that darkness, stop. Take a look at all the pieces of your shattered self. Decide which ones you want to keep and which ones you need to leave behind. Embrace your brokenness as you recreate yourself and your new life, for only in that very brief moment—you are limitless.

* She has also been referred to as The Keeper of Secrets, or The Undivided One in some texts. There are also disputes in the research with regard to how she is depicted—riding a crocodile versus a swan. More time would be necessary to do exhaustive research involving the mythology of Akhilandesvari in order to ascertain what was written in the original texts.

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