

The 3 most important words any man can say: "I NEED HELP"



In July of 2013, I put all of my personal belongings in storage, closed down my Venice Beach apartment, got on a plane and flew to my hometown, Boston, to live with my parents. I was 39 years old at the time.

I was excited for the move and ready for a change of scenery; however, the events that took place soon thereafter would send my body into a state of shock and lead my mind to a place of severe unrest.

It was during the first 6 months of living in LA that two major, life-altering events took place:

- 1) I broke up with the woman who I thought was 'the one' and
- 2) I got fired from the job that prompted my move to Southern California.

I felt lost, lonely, scared, desperate, and completely disconnected to any sense of internal stability.

From the outside looking in, one could say, “hell yah, fresh start!”, but at that time, I wasn’t in the right frame of mind to respond with that type of enthusiasm.

I quickly learned that regardless of the amount of personal work I had done with yoga and weekly therapy sessions, life’s twists and turns have the ability to trigger our deepest wounds and spin us out of control in relatively short order.

The three major pillars that routinely provide us with stability in the world: home, relationships and work, were all in a massive state of flux and I was not handling my situation very well. In response I completely lost my sense of identity, was struck with insomnia, and my body spiralled into a perpetual state of anxiety.

So, I took responsibility and sought out different methods of physical and emotional support; I dove into my meditation practice, attended regular yoga classes, confided in close friends and was in weekly therapy, only to find that my efforts weren’t being met with desirable results—meditation gave me feelings of temporary sanity and yoga immersed me in the community, but more often than not, both practices seemed to make me more anxious. Conversations with friends seemed to go in endless circles. And my therapy sessions would occasionally provide a short glimmer of relief. But ultimately, I was right back where I started.

I went on frequent, long bike rides, hoping that extensive exercise would make me feel better. But as soon as I’d finish a ride, I’d walk up the stairs in my apartment, fall to the floor, and immediately start crying.

Within a few months, I’d exhausted most of my available resources, and, being in a state of extreme fatigue, I concluded that I needed additional support.

With what seemed like nowhere else to turn, I swallowed my pride, connected to my heart, picked up the phone, called my parents, and emphatically screamed, “I NEED HELP”. It was in that moment that I felt my first sense of reprieve and decided to move back to Boston. Indefinitely.

I spent the next 9 months living on my parents’ couch and continuing to seek out the necessary support to help get me back to a place of stability. It took a lot of hard work, but when I finally regained my footing, I decided to move back to Venice Beach.

I often reflect on this specific time in my life with quite a bit of trepidation, because it triggers painful memories for me; however, it's become abundantly clear that the time I spent in Boston was invaluable, as it forced me to look closely at my personal fears and also come to terms with my own fragility in this world. The process was simultaneously gut-wrenching, and the most fortuitous experience of my life.

Most of my time in Boston was spent in relative solitude, but when I did opt to be somewhat social, I was often met with a sense of bewilderment from my friends and acquaintances, as it was relatively easy to discern that I was physically exhausted and emotionally unstable. Many of them, didn't know what to say or how to respond to me.

As a means of breaking the ice, I'd simply let people know that I was going through a hard time, but had faith that everything was going to be ok.

This approach definitely helped, because once I established a comfortable rapport with the person I was speaking with, that person tended to open up and share some of their own personal trials and tribulations with me.

On the flip side, I was often acknowledged for my bravery and the fact that I had the balls to reach out to my family and ask them for help, as if this is something that we, as humans, aren't inherently supposed to do.

As time went on and I felt better, I found myself having more conversations with people in the Boston community; friends and strangers alike. With each conversation, I became increasingly more curious and intrigued with how people would respond to my admission of a personal crisis, and the societal norms that shaped many of their belief systems.

Both men and women seemed genuinely surprised that I was willing to stand up and publicly admit that I needed help. However, I found my female counterparts were able to understand and connect to my personal struggles, on a much deeper level than most men were. The painful emotions and feelings that I shared seemed more accessible to them.

I felt seen and heard by my female counterparts.

On the other hand, most men were far more likely to keep our conversations on the surface and not allow themselves to connect with me on the deeper emotional levels. I could often feel their discomfort around the idea of establishing a true heart to heart connection with me.

Now this isn't to say that these men didn't want to connect with me on the deeper levels, but rather, to suggest that most of them simply didn't know how to. In the past, when something felt unfamiliar, and uncomfortable to me, I would often respond to the situation by speaking in general terms, suppressing emotions and keeping things superficial; I saw this behaviour mirrored back to me when I tried to connect with many of my male friends in Boston.

I'm not suggesting that these guys weren't supportive! I mean, these are some of my closest friends; they love me and they are solid individuals. They showed up for me, to the best of their ability and gave me all the support that they had. And, most times, I desired a deeper connection than they were capable of giving.

Generally speaking, there was a fearlessness that existed in many of the women I spoke with; an overall willingness to go deep and a sense of vulnerability that allowed them to quickly open up and connect to my darkness, yet not take it on for themselves. Conversely, the men often met me with fear; I could see it in their eyes. They didn't want to get too close, and I found this trend to be quite troubling.

I knew that many of my male friends and acquaintances, although maybe not as amplified as mine, struggled with many of the same fears and insecurities that I was struggling with. Yet, unfortunately, the conversations I had with them often left me feeling isolated, desperate for deeper male connections, and confused about the state of being a man in this world.

Since my days in Boston, I've had many in depth conversations with other men, from all parts of the world, via both my professional and social networks, and in doing so, I have become increasingly more aware of the notion that we as a society, are faced with an epidemic in this world.

Regardless of the severity of the situation, men are discouraged from raising their hands and saying, "I'm lost, scared and don't know what to do."

In fact, I found that the inherent belief that men are supposed to “man up”, “get tough”, and “figure it out”, continues to be ever present in our society; especially in men themselves. And the overwhelming sentiment regarding a man’s worth continues to place him in the proverbial bucket of being strong, brave, successful, resilient and independent.

Being emotionally independent can be a lonely place

Due to this overwhelming sense of independence, men continue to suppress their emotions and neglect to ask for help, even in the smallest of situations. These suppressed emotions aggregate into a ball of restless energy and eventually get released into the world in the form of anger, resentment, loneliness and, in severe situations, suicide, as males account for 4 out of 5 suicides in the United States.

It’s heart wrenching for me to look at this, because I am deeply familiar with the struggles I experienced when I opted to suppress my emotions and not speak up when I’ve needed additional support.

Luckily, moving back to Boston, albeit a very challenging time for me, also gave me the opportunity to fully release any judgments towards myself, and step into a loving environment with my family, where I was able to test the waters of what it really means to ask for help, let my guard down and simply surrender.

Here are 6 major life lessons I learned through the process:

1) Perspective is everything

There were countless moments when I’d stop in my tracks, look at myself in the mirror and say, “how the fuck did this happen?!” — “How, at 39 years old, did I end up on my parent’s couch, jobless, homeless and scared of my own shadow?”

Most times, I didn’t have a very good answer to this question. However, what became abundantly clear to me, is that more often than not, I was seeing the world from the perspective of the victim.

The victim is the voice inside of me who claims that someone, either myself or another person, is to blame — the victim makes a clear distinction that someone is “right” and someone else is “wrong”. The victim takes the position of either, “the

world is against me”, or “I can’t do anything right in this world” and for me, the latter belief of, “I can’t do anything right” and “it’s all my fault” was the predominant feeling at the time.

For many months, my mind lived in a perpetual loop of self-doubt, self-blame, self-hatred, and any other negative feelings that I was able to turn towards and against myself. And, it felt as if the loop was never going to end, until one day, it finally slowed down and I was able to gain a tiny sliver of a refreshing, new perspective—the perspective of empowerment.

The shift in perspective was slow, gradual and incremental and certainly didn’t happen overnight. But when I was able to peek through the crack and recognize that no one is to blame for anything, regardless of what was happening in my life, I started to feel a sense of relief from what seemed like my own private hell.

In the past, I had a tendency to make a person, place or thing either “right” or “wrong”, but once the empowered perspective grabbed a hold of me, I was able to see that everything that was happening was an opportunity for learning. And because of that, no one was to blame, not me, not my ex-girlfriend, not my friends. Nobody. Over time, this perspective gave me an opportunity to heal.

2) Change happens at its own pace

One of my teachers made a comment a few years ago that has stuck with me ever since. He said, “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans”. Whether or not, you or I, believe in God is really a moot point in this instance, because the point he was trying to make is that, regardless of any belief system, or how much effort we put towards changing our lives, the reality is that change is going to happen at its own pace, whether we like it or not.

There were many times when I wanted my situation to change faster; I wanted to feel better. I wanted to feel normal and simply be able to function in the world. But the truth is that the process of changing was something I had no control over. Things were going to take as long as necessary for true change to occur. And, when I say “true change”, I’m referring to the depths of who I am as a human being, the things that I stand for, and the ways that I relate to myself as I move through the world.

With every moment that I resisted the process of change, I stepped further away from the reality of what was happening in my life. Conversely, when I was able to

take a deep breath, gather myself, acknowledge that my body, mind and spirit were healing and appreciate the process, I inevitably embraced my journey and allowed things to unfold at their own pace. In doing so, I slowly learned to embrace change, rather than fight against it.

3) My ego ain't goin' away

No matter how successful I was at stepping into the empowered perspective or embracing the pace of my own personal evolution, my ego continuously showed up to remind me of its presence and challenge me throughout the process.

Growing up I was an athlete and competed at various levels for my entire life. Through my athletic experiences, I was taught about winning and defeating the opposition. So, needless to say, when life put a chokehold on me, and I wasn't able to defeat its efforts, my ego took a huge hit.

I was no longer in a position to win. It didn't matter if I moved faster, or quicker, as these counteractions became irrelevant in the face of my own immortality. I was being asked to slow down, make changes in my life, take a deep breath and accept that I was in a place of transition, without a clear path ahead of me.

When I looked around and saw friends and other people my own age going to work and moving through their days with purpose, my ego would often come calling and say, "hey, get your shit together, dude, you should be doing something else". In those moments, it was easy to "should on myself", as they say, and it took tremendous fortitude to look at my ego, embrace it for its presence and not give in to its judgments towards me.

4) It takes a village

Because sports played a significant role in my life, I've always believed in teamwork. Whether as a player, teacher or coach, I've experienced and grown from the love and support that comes from being part of a team.

As I've gotten older, it's become increasingly more difficult to immerse myself in supportive communities that will continue to foster my own growth and healing. And, when the shit hit the fan, it took a huge effort and a lot of strength for me to reach out and find the necessary support that I needed to get me through those difficult times.

In an effort to take advantage of the resources available to me, I went to see a therapist twice a week, received frequent energy work, went to acupuncture regularly, practiced yoga, met with men's groups such as [The Mankind Project](#), and participated in other community support groups. Doing so, re-enforced the notion that I need a team to support my personal growth and my healing process. Reaching out to others, looking them in the eye, and saying, "I NEED HELP" was an invaluable exercise; one that I intend to use whenever I need support. People really WANT to help one another; it's a common point of connection for the community at large.

When I asked for help, my friends came through.

5) I have all the answers inside of me

Regardless of how many people I sought out for emotional support and guidance, at the end of the day, I came to realize that I have all of the answers inside of me. In order to access the answers, I speak about, I had to sort through a bunch of emotional garbage along the way.

Anger, Sadness, loneliness and confusion, to name a few, often came flying to the surface and forced me to look directly at the choices I was making in my life. What choices no longer served me? And, if they no longer served me, why did I continue to make those same choices, over and over again? What are the destructive patterns and behaviours that continue to show up in my life? And, if I am willing to change these behaviours, what am I going to do to institute and implement positive change?

The irony in this entire process, is that I found great comfort in some of my destructive behaviours and patterns. I partook in them for so long that in many senses, they became "blind spots", that would creep up when I least expected it. They became part of the way I moved through life. So, to make the necessary positive changes that I desired, it required a very slow and concerted effort on my behalf.

As I learned many times before, growth is a process, not an event. And during this time, it was critical for me to be extremely gentle and kind with myself. I was learning how to move through my anger and sadness with clear intentions and a sense of purpose and I ultimately came out on the other side with a new sense of joy and an understanding that I have the power to make my own choices.

As I move through life, I continue to face my challenges and struggles head on. However, I fully understand and embrace the notion that I have all the answers inside of me. I am able to make choices, at every moment, of every day, that will positively impact me, as life continues to unfold in mystical and unexpected ways.

6) Humility is the gateway to freedom

“Breakdowns can create breakthroughs. Things fall apart so things can fall together.”—unknown

Yup, someone unknown said that, and I am grateful for the wisdom of this person, because this theory feels very much in line with my own personal breakdown aka breakthrough.

[Pema Chodron](#), in her book, “When Things Fall Apart”, talks about “leaning into the sharp points” in life. This metaphor was instrumental for me as it certainly reminded me time and again, to step into my fears, lean in and learn more about “why” and “how” I chose to move through the world. And, in doing so, I was able to slowly break down some of my old protective layers and move closer to my heart.

I remain a work in progress; however, I’ve experienced a significant change in how I relate to others and myself. I was deeply humbled by everything that transpired in Boston and it is through my humility that I am able to connect more deeply to the love that resides underneath my anger and sadness, and hopefully continue to share this with the important people in my life.

I distinctly remember one night, during a long walk with my brother, when he turned to me and said, “You know, Adam, I know that you’re not feeling great, but I have to say, this has been the most enjoyable experience I’ve ever had with you.”

And, I think that pretty much sums it up; humility is the gateway to freedom.

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