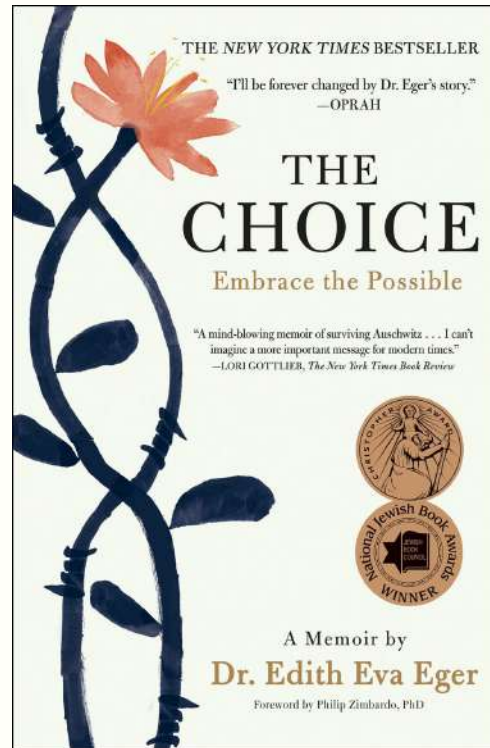


Dr. Edith Eva Eger

THE CHOICE

Embrace the Possible



OVERVIEW

Dr. Edith Eva Eger takes her experiences in one of the most unimaginable times in the world into a way of helping others. She shares with us her experiences and how she survived. Her healing journey had challenges and through her openness of these hardships the reader sees that we always have a choice. Others may not be able to witness our choices but we always have a choice in how we think.

Contents

About the Author - 2

Prison - 3

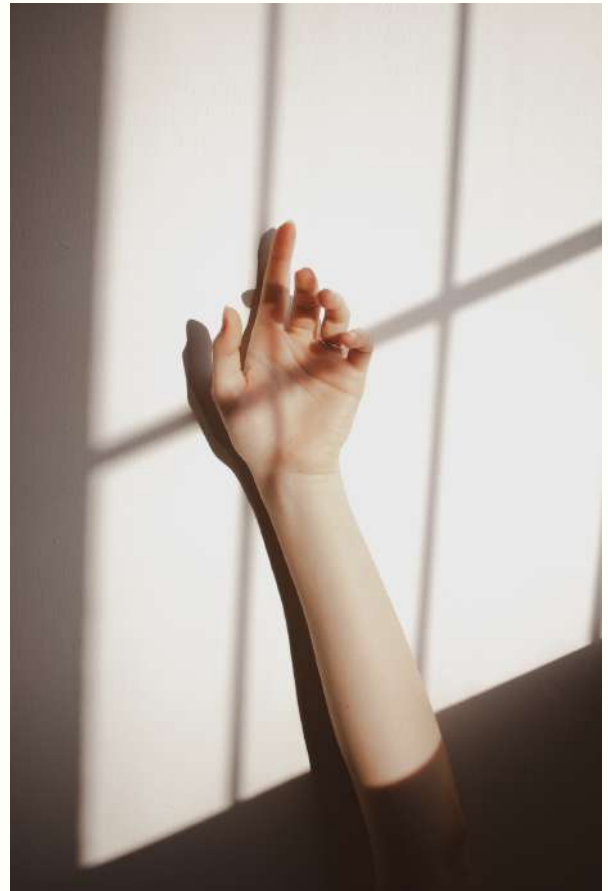
Escape - 6

Freedom - 8

Healing - 13

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Edith Eva Eger uses her life experiences to assist people who have experienced trauma in their lives. She shares with her readers her life prior to being sent to Auschwitz, living through Auschwitz, being pulled from a pile of dead corpses by Allied Forces to her life after Auschwitz. She helps readers see they can find freedom from the negativities that may occur in one's life. There is always choice no matter how bleak things may seem.



"ONCE WE ARE RECOGNIZING AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR FEELINGS, WE CAN LEARN TO RECOGNIZE AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR ROLE IN THE DYNAMIC THAT SHAPES OUR RELATIONSHIPS." - DR. EDITH EVA EGER

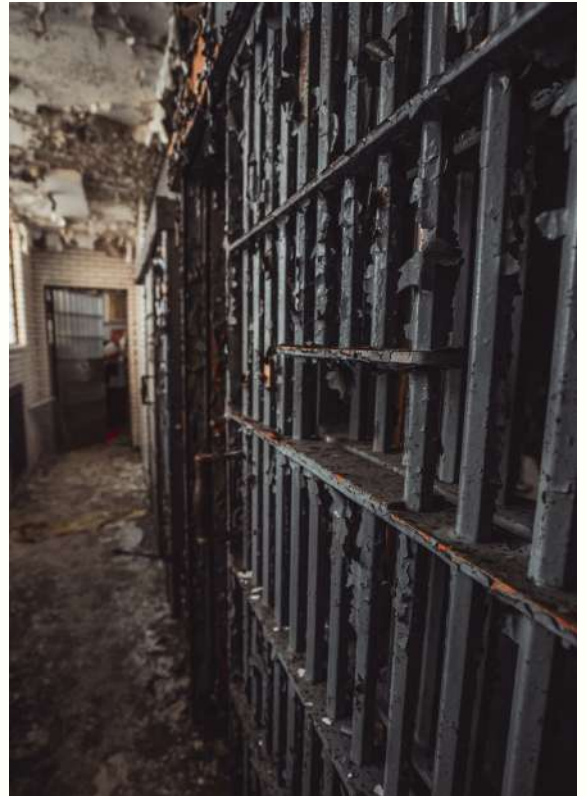


PART 1 - PRISON

In part 1, Dr. Edith Eva Eger introduces us to her life prior to being sent to Auschwitz. She knew from a young age that her father wished for her to have been a boy. She was his third daughter. She experienced teasing at the hands of her older sisters. She acquired a facial deformity from a botched medical procedure (Eger, p.14). Dr. Eger becomes a well trained ballerina and gymnast and her training is something she continues to use in her future.

Prior to being sent to Auschwitz, Dr. Eger was experiencing unrest where she lived due to conflict regarding the borders of Czechoslovakia. Her family was experiencing the loss of choice and freedom. The day comes when Dr. Eger and her family are forced from their home. They are kept in a brick factory before being loaded onto a train - "we are human cargo" (Eger, p.33). They have no knowledge, no control over what is happening to them.

Dr. Eger's father provides her with advice that she will carry with her throughout her life and she will use this information in her work with others. "Just remember, no one can take from you what you've put in your mind." (Eger, p.34) Dr. Eger uses this mantra when she is made to dance for Dr. Mengele; the Angel of Death. When things are feeling out of control or that an individual has no choice there is one thing he/she has control over - his/her mind.



**"WE CANNOT CHOOSE TO HAVE A LIFE FREE OF HURT. BUT WE CAN CHOOSE TO BE FREE, TO ESCAPE THE PAST, NO MATTER WHAT BEFALLS US, AND TO EMBRACE THE POSSIBLE. I INVITE YOU TO MAKE THE CHOICE TO BE FREE."
- DR. EDITH EVA EGER**



PART 1 - PRISON

After her arrival at Auschwitz, Dr. Eger's mom is immediately sent to the gas chambers due to Dr. Eger's response to a question given to her by Dr. Mengele. She immediately experiences the loss of her choices. Everything that is happening to her is out of her control. Through the removal of her hair, clothes and parents. Dr. Eger realizes "It's the first time I see that I have a choice: to pay attention to what we've lost or pay attention to what we still have"(Eger,p. 38). Dr. Eger found a way to take an unimaginable experience and find choice in that experience.

In the dire conditions the women were forced to live within the barracks of Auschwitz; they discovered ways to find joy in the negativity around them. As Dr. Eger states, "We can choose what the horror teaches us" (p.43). The women embraced their emancipated bodies and celebrated them. They found ways to connect and support each other. Dr. Eger and her counterparts were able to unify with laughter(Eger,p.50); they chose to create happy moments in extreme dire situations.



"OUR PAINFUL EXPERIENCES AREN'T A LIABILITY - THEY'RE A GIFT. THEY GIVE US PERSPECTIVE AND MEANING, AN OPPORTUNITY TO FIND OUR UNIQUE PURPOSE AND OUR STRENGTH." - DR. EDITH EVA EGER



PART 1 - PRISON

Choice occurs in every situation and it is a matter of making a choice. Magda, Dr. Eger's sister who has been living with her in Auschwitz made a choice to stand up to the guards. She paid for that choice by being beaten but the choice was hers to not comply. By staying true to her choice; she forced the guard to lose control. She was in control "not the victim of fate"(Eger,p.60). Just prior to being rescued from a pile of rotting corpses; Dr. Eger is watching the horrors of starvation, survival and chooses to occupy her mind with choice(p.66)



"THIS IS WHY I NOT OBJECT TO PATHOLOGIZING POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS BY CALLING IT A DISORDER. IT'S NOT A DISORDERED REACTION TO TRAUMA - IT'S A COMMON AND NATURAL ONE." - DR. EDITH EVA EGER



PART 2 - ESCAPE

In the days that followed Dr. Eger and Magda's rescue; Dr. Eger witnessed the choices other's make; the choice to ignore them, the choice to rape them, or the choice to help them. As a survivor who has had very little choice; having choice is a new freedom they need to relearn(Eger,p.79). Dr. Eger and Magda were able to reunite with their sister Klara who managed to remain hidden through the war. Dr. Eger struggled with survivor's guilt (p.88). "The irony of freedom is that it is harder to find hope and purpose"(Eger,p.91). The survival guilt led to depression. Dr. Eger found when she was in camp she had something to fight against. With freedom was the realization of all she had lost and now she faced the question "Why not choose not to be?"(Eger,p.95).



"EVERYTHING CAN BE TAKEN FROM A MAN BUT ONE THING: THE LAST OF THE HUMAN FREEDOMS - TO CHOOSE ONE'S ATTITUDE IN ANY GIVEN SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES TO CHOOSE ONE'S OWN WAY. EACH MOMENT IS A CHOICE. NO MATTER HOW FRUSTRATING OR BORING OR CONSTRAINING OR PAINFUL OR OPPRESSIVE OUR EXPERIENCE. WE CAN ALWAYS CHOOSE HOW WE RESPOND. AND I FINALLY BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THAT I, TOO, HAVE A CHOICE. THIS REALIZATION WILL CHANGE MY LIFE." - DR. EDITH EVA EGER



PART 2 - ESCAPE

The next choice in her life was marriage; her first love was killed in Auschwitz. Bela was a man who gave her and her sisters' food and wrote her letters and as Dr. Eger stated "... and I have a choice to make"(p.99). The choice was made to marry not for love but to prove her sister wrong(p.99).

As survivors of the Holocaust, Dr. Eger and Bela are trying to live a life of what they think is normal. In this choice, they are hiding away the past and not healing. They believe this is the safer way. After the birth of their first child life becomes unsafe for them again. They must decide to move to Israel or the United States. A choice that will impact their futures. Dr. Eger found the strength to make the choice of America even if her husband did not want to go with her(p.125).



"WE'RE FREE FROM THE DEATH CAMPS, BUT WE ALSO MUST BE FREE TO - FREE TO CREATE, TO MAKE A LIFE, TO CHOOSE. AND UNTIL WE FIND OUR FREEDOM TO, WE'RE JUST SPINNING AROUND IN THE SAME ENDLESS DARKNESS." - DR. EDITH EVA EGER



PART 3 - FREEDOM

Dr. Eger learns that making a choice to physically distance oneself from where the trauma related incidence occurred does not make it disappear. "I did not yet know that nightmares know no geography. That guilt and anxiety"(Eger,p.129). In making this huge choice she tells us that sacrifice was at the heart of this decision. They were giving up one life for an unknown life and they would never know how the other outcome would have been had they stayed. Dr. Eger chose to trust her choice but in doing so she chose to deny sadness and fear.(p.131)

Settling into America proved to have many challenges for Dr. Eger. Working her first job she realized that if she worked all the time she would not have be alone with her thoughts.(p.133) As she settled into society she encountered what later she would learn was an automatic response to trauma. She tells us that now she objects to "pathologizing post-traumatic stress by calling it a disorder. It's not a disordered reaction to trauma - it's a common and natural one"(Eger,p.135). Her insight assists those with trauma diagnosis to understand that trauma does not define who we are but it is a part of us and our reactions are natural.



"AND IF I CAN KEEP THE NOISE AND URGENCY AROUND ME AT ALL TIMES, I WILL NOT HAVE TO BE ALONE EVEN FOR A MOMENT WITH MY OWN THOUGHTS." - DR. EDITH EVA EGER



PART 3 - FREEDOM

Another drawback Dr. Eger encounters in her new life was feeling unworthy. Why did I survive? As immigrants they faced language barriers, poor employment opportunities and financial challenges again they are given limited choice. They mourn the life they were forced to give up. "I didn't get to choose ... Hitler and Mengele chose for me. I didn't get to choose"(Eger.,140). Dr. Eger and her husband were experiencing the effects of trauma but they didn't understand this at this time in their lives. One of the effects that Dr. Eger struggles with a with feeling of worthlessness. She has spent many years being treated poorly due to her religious beliefs and it becomes something she believes to be true about herself.

Dr. Eger and her family relocated to an area in the United States where there were many immigrants which they believed could make it easier to settle. A chance meeting at a playground reignites a friendship from the war. Someone who understands her past. Life is becoming more settled for the Eger family. Dr. Eger registered in university fulfilling a dream she had before Auschwitz. Then another choice is made by Dr. Eger. She chooses to drop out of university to care for her disabled son.



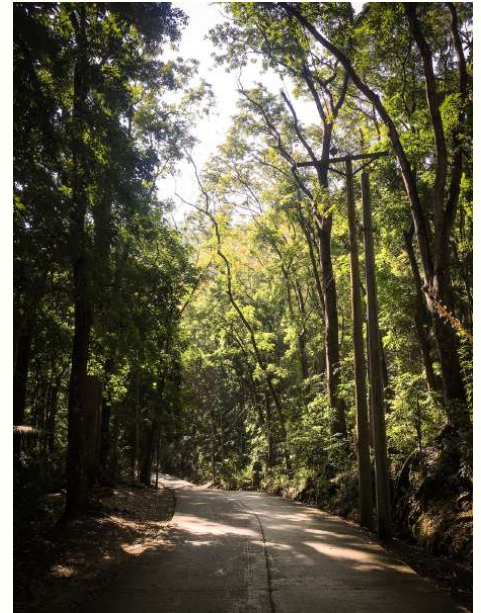
"THERE ARE ALWAYS TWO WORLDS. THE ONE THAT I CHOOSE AND THE ONE I DENY, WHICH INSERTS ITSELF WITHOUT MY PERMISSION." - DR. EDITH EVA EGER



PART 3 - FREEDOM

Dr. Eger's unhealed trauma impacted her children. This was not something she intended to teach them but she was coping in every day life the best she could. Sirens would cause her to cover her head and hide. Her children thought this is what everyone did.

Coping looked differently for Dr. Eger and her husband. For Dr. Eger, she chose to hide her past. She was living simultaneously in two worlds and this would occur in various times in her life. Her secret world was challenged upon being given Viktor Frankl's book Man's Search for Meaning. Dr. Eger finds a support and understanding while reading his book. "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. Each moment is a choice. No matter how painful or oppressive our experience, we can always choose how we respond. And I finally begin to understand that I, too, have a choice. This realization will change my life"(Eger,p.156). Her family did not bring up Auschwitz and the war around her. Her husband was of the belief that surviving was a celebration. The couple encountered challenges due to their unique ways of coping.



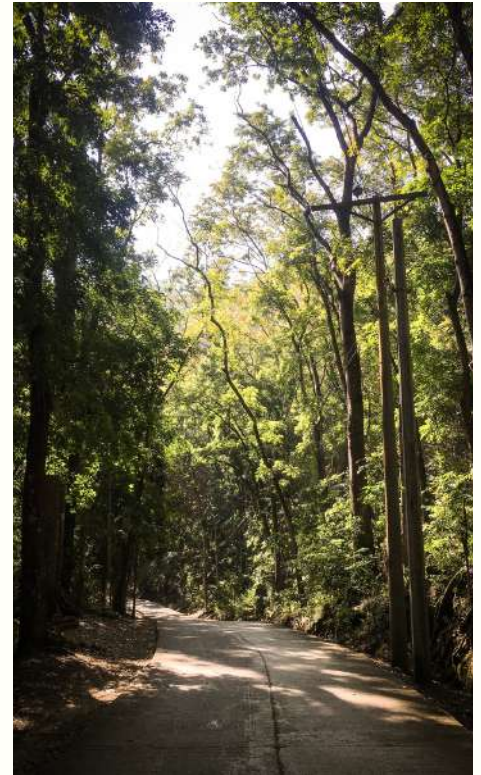
**"WE CAN'T ERASE THE PAIN. BUT WE ARE FREE TO ACCEPT WHO WE ARE AND WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO US, AND MOVE ON."
- DR. EDITH EVA EGER**



PART 3 - FREEDOM

Dr. Eger uses Frankl's wisdom in her life. "On my freedom to choose my own response to any situation"(Eger,p.159). Dr. Eger separates from her husband as she viewed his support as limiting her. Support from fellow students and professors provide the opportunity for Dr. Frankl and Dr. Eger connect through letters and continue a friend relationship through out their lives. They are able to share questions, thoughts and wonderings as survivors of Auschwitz. Through this journey , Dr. Eger realizes the void she feels is hers to work through. No education, job or relationship will fill this void. This is the trauma she has to work through in order to move forward in life.

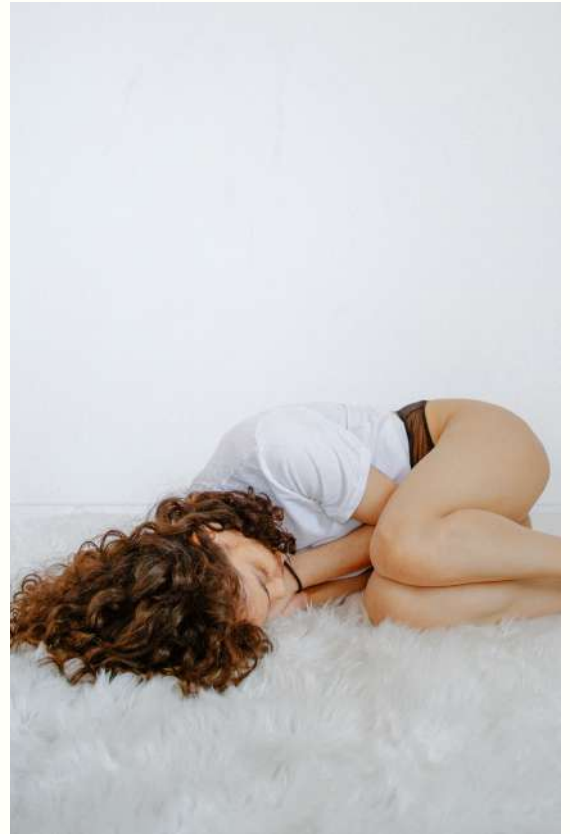
In furthering her education, Dr. Eger learns "Suffering is inevitable and universal. But how we respond to suffering differs"(p.170). People have different traumas they have experienced and Dr. Eger reminds us "... you can live to avenge the past, or you can live to enrich the present"(Eger,p.175). This is a turning point for Dr. Eger. She is realizing that what happened to her does not determine her worth. How she lives her life after trauma is her choice. "We can choose to take responsibility for our hardships and our healing. We can choose to be free"(Eger,p.177). As her work as a psychiatrist, Dr. Eger will use her life experiences and knowledge of personal choice in her work with others. In the cases Dr. Eger shares with the readers we see how she uses these experiences to learn about herself. A lesson that has been useful for Dr. Eger in her personal life is "you can't heal if you can't feel"(Eger,p.196). Dr. Eger had to come to terms with the trauma she experienced in her youth in order to move forward in her life, in her career, socially and with her family.



"BUT DESPITE - AND, REALLY, BECAUSE OF - THE STRUGGLES AND THE TRAGEDIES IN OUR LIVES, EACH OF US HAS THE CAPACITY TO GAIN THE PERSPECTIVE THAT TRANSFORMS US FROM VICTIM TO THRIVER. WE CHOOSE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR HARDSHIPS AND HEALING. WE CAN CHOOSE TO BE FREE." - DR. EDITH EVA EGER

PART 3 - FREEDOM

Another learning of Dr. Eger was "(i)t's easier to hold someone or something else responsible for your pain than to take responsibility for ending your own victimhood"(p.204). Even in an individual's darkest hours we have choice. As Dr. Eger reminds her readers "Maybe to heal isn't to erase the scar, or even to make the scar. To heal is to cherish the wound" (Eger,p.225). People cannot change what has happened to them but if they learn that it does not define who they are and they can make the choice to move forward. She reminds us that we are responsible for our own happiness(p.232). This is a choice we all have as individuals.



"BUT FROM THIS MOMENT ON, I UNDERSTOOD THAT FEELINGS NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL, AREN'T FATAL. AND THEY ARE TEMPORARY." - DR. EDITH EVA EGER



PART 4 - HEALING

"Our painful experiences aren't a liability - they're a gift. They give us perspective and meaning, an opportunity find our unique purpose and our strength"(Eger,p.237). Switching an individuals perspective from "Why me?" to what can I learn, is a skill that requires individuals to reframe his/her thinking. Dr. Eger tells us that by taking responsibility for our feelings we can learn how who we are impacts our relationships(p.237). When individuals understand their responses they can see how these responses impact the world around him/her. We are responsible for our actions and the impact our actions have on others.

Dr. Eger challenges the saying "Time Heals". She notes it is not the time that does the healing but "(i)t's what you do with the time"(Eger,p.263). We are in control of ourselves. As in some cases like Dr. Eger; where she did not have control of what was happening to her but she was in control of her thoughts, her responses and her feelings. As we learn more we grow as individuals. "We rely on our old coping mechanisms. We become the person we think we need to be to please others. It takes willpower and choice not to step back into the confirming roles we mistakenly believe will keep us safe" (Eger,p.268). By choosing not to conform we are choosing to be the individual we are and do what we need for ourselves to heal and move forward in life.



**"THERE'S ALSO THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND
A WAY TO SUFFER LESS, TO CHOOSE
HAPPINESS, WHICH REQUIRES TAKING
RESPONISBILITY FOR YOURSELF."
- DR. EDITH EVA EGER**



PART 4 - HEALING

Through her journey as a child in a war torn country, to surviving Auschwitz, to moving to a new country, to finding herself, to healing herself and then to working with clients; Dr. Eger shares "the most important truth I know, that the biggest prison is in your own mind, and in your pocket you already hold the key: the willingness to risk, the willingness to release yourself from judgement and reclaim your innocence, accepting and loving yourself for who you really are - human, imperfect, and whole"(p.271). As humans, we need to realize we are not perfect. Life will happen and in some cases we have no control. What we as individuals have control over is our internal mindset. We are going to make mistakes, experience trauma, be at the mercy of others but ultimately we have choice over who we are, what we think, what we feel and how we respond. We are our own strongest supporter.



**"WE DON'T KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING, WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, BUT NO ONE CAN TAKE AWAY FROM YOU WHAT YOU PUT IN YOU OWN MIND."
- DR. EDITH EVA EGER**

References

Eger, Edith Eva. (2017). *The Choice Embrace the Possible*. Scribner. United States of America.

Frankl, Viktor. (2006). *Man's Search for Meaning*. Library of Congress. United States of America.

