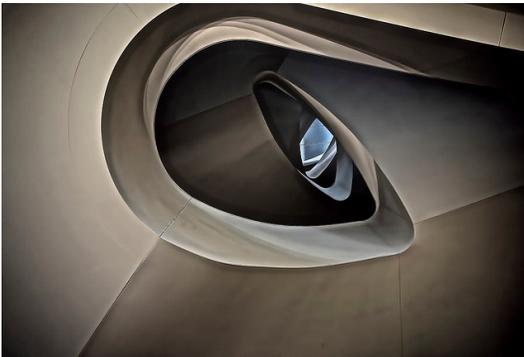




Change is Scary. Most People Fear Confronting their Inner World.

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Via Elizabeth Kovar
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An enlightening excerpt from Elizabeth Rae Kovar's newest travel memoir, *Finding Om: An Indian Journey of Rickshaws, Chai, Chapattis and Gurus*.

Your Story

Change is inevitable. The minutes, the days the seasons and the years—everything around us changes. Nature embraces change as easily as the wind blows through a meadow of sunflowers. It's a part of life and nature doesn't resist change, but rebirths every time it is destroyed.

But do we humans embrace the same change as nature? Some welcome change with open arms where others resist it like a nail boarded into a wooden plank, trying to not surrender and break amidst the surrounding hurricane. Some people accept change more easily in certain areas of life, such as technology, job promotions and raises. But most fear that change from within. Why? Change is scary and most people fear confronting their inner world.

The reality is that not all change needs to be difficult and scary, but rather an adventure into an

unknown land to soak up the sun and to drink up the lessons of life. One can find change by simply exiting one's comfort zone.

Nothing grows in the comfort zone.

I couldn't help but fall in love with Australia. The Aussies enjoyed every moment of life and had a smart approach to human existence. Life was a priority before work. Australia opened my eyes to see that anything in life is possible, and encouraged my passport to accumulate more stamps. I had a long way to go, but I began to overcome the internal battles that I'd had as a young female. Yoga and writing began to help me understand my emotions.

After several yoga classes, I felt inspired to write in my journal. So far, I was enjoying yoga. I did yoga a couple times in the states, but the gym atmosphere was not inspirational. I found beauty in the graceful flow of the human body. At the end of class we'd do this deep meditation. After several sessions, I began to cry during the meditation and final relaxation. I didn't know why, but I continued to cry. Part of it could have been the soothing, ambient music, which was so lovely it made me emotional. But I think the other realization hit me. I was in Australia!

The solo moments of me, my surfboard and the ocean twinkled in my eyes throughout the day and then I stared at the stars at night. I united with the earth and Australia in a way that I'd never thought was possible.

But it was that impeccable energy that encouraged living every day to its fullest. Australia pushed me out of my comfort zone, and inspired me to live life equipped with equal parts of work and play, although play usually won the battle. Life in Australia was a sensual blend of spiritual and sexual energy that equally balanced the yin and yang of life.

The relaxation inherent in yoga helped me with the fast-paced world that I knew. In America, we only know how to be on the go all the time and how to be stressed; in contrast, the Aussie lifestyle was "live in the now." Yoga was telling me to have fun, as this may be the only time I was going to be in this country. It also told me to quit worrying about money and to take a break from constantly studying. Australia tangled my wounded heart into a deep love affair.

The best moments were my beach walks wearing nothing but my bathing suit, sarong, CD player and plastic headphones. Listening to inspirational beats while grounding my feet into the earth connected my soul with freedom. The sun soaked my body with energy while the rustling waves drenched my legs with happiness. With every footstep, my brain sunk deeper into a meditative oceanic state while my consciousness ascended to the Universe. I now realized that heaven on earth did exist and my soul had found it's home.

Between surfing, nightclubbing, scuba diving, walking the beach and doing yoga, my soul rebirthed. There was no fear, but only excitement for what the future held.

Getting out of our comfort zone expands us in ways that are not imaginable. We push our boundaries and re-prioritize what we want out of life. Somewhere within life's lessons, when we re-enter reality, we must never forget what we've learned.

When lost, never give up hope.

Tired, exhausted and depleted, I had no connection to my soul. The life I once knew in Australia was gone. Completely gone with the wind. Nine months gone, to be exact, since I'd left Australia. Every day my life revolved around work and school, worrying about money, contemplating whether my relationship would last and yelling at the ceiling every night, begging for just two hours of sleep. One sleepless night, I stumbled into the bathroom and ran my fingers across my head, pulling out chunks of hair. Some say stress caused hair loss, but I "knew" I had a hair disease. Stress doesn't affect young people since we have the energy to do everything, right?

Soaked in a puddle of tears, I realized the reverse culture shock and my responsibilities had hit me harder than I realized. The new me didn't fit into this old me environment. Plus, what would I do with this sports management degree, anyway?

Australia had opened my eyes and I now envisioned a life and career different than my original intentions. Since my life began to evolve in fitness, I began to despise the darker side of sports. But everything in my life was spiraling out of control.

Diet, exercise, thinking, working and studying. Everything was extreme. My body was tired and my mind was so lost. Some days I spent two to three hours at the gym, trying to lose the last of my "freshman 28" that I had gained. I hadn't done yoga often, but the little I did was smashed between strength training and a cardio session at the gym. Since I was mentoring with my fitness director, I found that I naturally gravitated to yoga, again. But she said I needed to be certified in order to teach. That thought only added to my worries, as I didn't have thousands of dollars to spend on training. Plus, my insecurities sabotaged my boyfriend's career and what I wanted with my life.

Sitting on the bathroom floor in just a T-shirt, I stood up and looked in the mirror. I did not recognize that broken person I saw in the mirror with black circles around her eyes and rosy cheeks that were inflamed from anxiety. I felt guilty for putting a 25-year-old man through my insomniac-ridden and caffeine-addicted drama. I thought about Australia and compared it to my current situation. I kept asking myself, "Didn't I just figure myself out and the wonders of life in Australia?" The stagnant farm-town environment and hectic schedule depleted my soul. I felt as if my current environment only inspired mediocrity.

Thirsty, I walked into the kitchen to drink a glass of water. I sat on the kitchen chair and tucked my knees underneath my T-shirt. I rested my head on my knees while my hand hugged the glass of water. After drinking, I placed the empty glass on the table.

Glancing upward, I noticed the small tapestry and wooden turtle I'd bought in Fiji just after I'd left Australia. Untucking my legs from beneath the shirt, I stood up and placed my hand on the turtle. I flashed back to the images of sitting alone on the beach, with my turtle-insignia surfboard next to me. The memories flooded my mind. I took this as a sign that I needed to slow down and it confirmed my decision to do something about my situation.

The next day, I walked to the student psychology services office. I'd become desperate for help and desperate to understand my unstable mind.

Although people can keep changing and evolving, many people seeking help opt into a structured class, workshop or seminar. Finding the "right therapeutic shoe that fits" is a trial and error process. Even if a certain therapy doesn't help, there is still something to be learned from that experience.

I felt as if I'd consulted the world about my hair loss and my unstable mind. The campus doctor prescribed me Zoloft. My dermatologist told me to stop being a vegan and eat meat. The psychologist told me to go to a stress management group, and the light therapy doctor whose skin was as burnt as a leather handbag suggested an overly priced package of light treatment for my thinning hair. I felt hopeless, but I still had hope for natural healing.

During my night class, I fell asleep and arose several minutes before class ended. I walked out of class slowly, and as I yawned in the hallway, I looked over my right shoulder. I noticed a poster with a man standing on top of a mountain with his arms raised in the air. The poster said, "What would you do if you could do anything?" Excited, I jotted down the information and went home to research this fellowship.

After days and countless minutes of thinking about exciting trips, I thought, "What would I do if I could do anything? Hmm, I would do everything!" And that's where the idea struck.

Thinking about my current mental state, I thought, "This is it. I want to study yoga in India."

Find your om.

Some therapies work, some don't, but there are usually one or two modalities that work like a charm. For many, yoga is that one therapeutic charm. It's as if the mat is the therapist and pushes one to live one's greatest life. Those who adopt a yoga practice cannot help but watch their life begin to organically change, just like nature.

During the first week of training, I realized I had never "done" yoga. I'd only attempted it. When fusing the mind, body and breath together, while the guru walked around with his adjustment cane, I could not help but look inward. Everything united and things began to evolve internally. Without realizing, I began to look at the world differently.

After a long day of exploring the town of Coonoor on our first day off, we yogis took a tuk-tuk back to the retreat. We drove along bumpy roads that meandered through green tea fields. I looked outside the window. I admired the beauty of this planet, fulfilled with the freedom that I desired. In that moment, I was as free as the birds that flew past the rickshaw, slowly spreading my wings, flying high to a better life.

On that very night, I looked at the ceiling, aware of strange feelings. Part of me wanted to cry but I could not release the emotions for some odd reason. I didn't think my emotions and wanna-shed tears came from sadness; it was from the natural process of letting go. All the lessons and wisdom made complete sense, but I feared and resisted to let go of old ways. In that moment, my only feelings were hope and happiness. I became proud of myself for my choices and knew I was on the right path toward success. Closing my eyes to go to sleep, I told myself, "One week down, five more to go."

Yoga teaches us that the destruction of something old recycles itself into something new. Like a flower, inner beauty can only blossom when one's inner world is receptive to change and does not fear to shed away the old habits and behaviors.

Finding Om: An Indian Journey of Rickshaws, Chai, Chapattis and Gurus is a travel memoir about backpacking and studying yoga in India. Find more information about the print and e-book versions [here](#).

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About Elizabeth Kovar



Elizabeth Kovar, M.A., is an award-winning vegan fitness trainer, author of **Finding Om** and international freelance writer and fitness presenter for BOSU and the American Council on Exercise (ACE). Elizabeth earned a title as one of 2014 Shape.com's "Top 50 Hottest Trainers in America" and was the first recipient of the Stuart R. Givens Fellowship to study yoga in India. Kovar studied yoga in six different countries and lived abroad in Australia (twice), India and Germany. She also instructs the community college course, Eight Limbs. Elizabeth has published over 1,000 print and online articles. She is the creator of a **vegan food and travel blog** and the web site, **lemon tree travel**.