

THE CHANGE CYCLE

The first phase of change is the scariest, especially because we aren’t taught to expect it. It’s the time when we lose our identity and are left temporarily formless: person soup. Most people fight like crazy to keep their identities from dissolving. This is just a blip, we tell ourselves when circumstances rock our world. “I’m the same person, and my life will go back to being the way it was.”

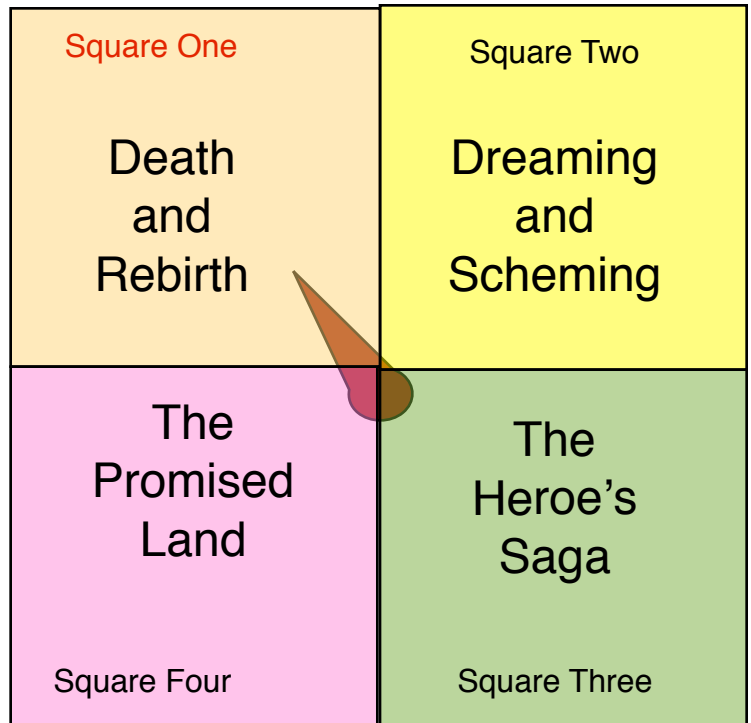
Sometimes, this is true. But in other cases, when true metamorphosis has begun, we run into a welter of dissolving experiences. We may feel that everything is falling apart, that we’re uncertain of our futures, that we’re losing everyone and everything. Dissolving feels like death, because it is: the demise of the person you’ve been. I don’t care if you’re Jane Q. Normal, Wonder Woman, or Jesus—this is scary. But you’ll get through it. You won’t have a choice. Many so-called primitive cultures have rituals designed to teach the art of dissolution. Participants’ faces may be obscured with paint or ash, their names taken away, their time spent in uncharted wilderness or dark, womb-like enclosures from which they are —reborn once they’ve figured out who they are. By forcing people into a contrived Phase One, the elders teach youngsters how dissolution feels, so they won’t freak out when they experience it in the real world.

We don’t have such traditions, so when we’re dissolving, we may get hysterical, fight our feelings, try to recapture our former lives, or jump immediately toward some new status quo (rebound romance is a classic example). All these measures actually slow down Phase One, and make it more painful.

These strategies work better:

In Phase One, live one day (or ten minutes) at a time. Instead of dwelling on hopes and fears about an unknowable future, focus your attention on whatever is happening right now.

- **Cocoon** by caring for yourself in physical, immediate ways. Wrap yourself in a blanket, make yourself a cup of hot tea, attend an exercise class, whatever feels comforting. Talk to others who have gone through metamorphosis. If you don’t have a wise relative or friend, a therapist or life coach can be a source of comfort and reassurance.



- **Let yourself grieve.** Even if you are leaving an unpleasant situation (a bad marriage, a job you didn’t like) you’ll probably go through the normal human response to any loss: the emotional roller coaster called the grieving process.

You’ll cycle through denial, anger, sadness, and acceptance many times. Just feeling these feelings will help them pass quickly.

If you think this sounds frustratingly passive, you’re right. Dissolving isn’t something you do; it’s something that happens to you. The closest you’ll come to controlling it is relaxing and trusting the process. At times, you’ll feel it’s the end of the world. Just remember that what the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.