

Letting go of the old

About five years ago, I was working in a job that I loved, but in an environment that had changed so much that I really had no place in it anymore. I am thankful to my employers for trying to make a niche for me, but after trying out a number of options it had become clear that I was stuck with work that was considered useful and necessary, but did not fit into the new company structure. I looked left and right on the job market but got rejected for the small number of jobs that were even realistically available to me.

I found myself spiralling downwards into a depression without even realising that things were gradually getting worse. Until one of my colleagues – and a good friend to boot – sat me down in her office and spelled out the facts for me. That act of kindness tipped the balance and I reclaimed some of my own power: I decided to be open to change, REALLY open! I turned myself into Yes-man, ready to look properly into anything that came my way.

Only a week later I received a message from an acquaintance (a yoga teacher who has become one of my closest friends since then), telling me of a tantra festival he just returned from, suggesting I check it out for the following year. I was intrigued by what I read and signed up as soon as registration opened.

Finding my way

During the long wait of nearly 9 months before the actual festival, my decision to be Yes-man started to waver. Still, even though I wondered if the festival was right for me, I stuck with it. I nearly didn't go at the last minute, the friends I stayed with in London en route gave me that last push to go for it.

I had never before been to a festival in my life, and yet it felt like coming home after only a couple of hours: I was greeted by my yoga friend and then quickly connected with all the other men around, most of whom were equally insecure about what was about to happen over the next couple of days. Speaking for myself, I ended up having two experiences that have truly changed me and have helped me find a new direction in life.

The first such experience happened during an ecstatic dance workshop, where I found myself letting go of restrictions over dance (be told: I always felt that I can't dance, and that

workshop proved me wrong) and then ended up opening a Pandora's box of bottled up emotions that all came out at once. I cried for hours and felt out of sorts with everyone, kept looking for the 'right' place to go and found it at the little temple.

I meditated – seated, then dancing quietly – in front of the Shiva Nataraj. I felt comfortable in the space, the sense of calm of the room, the lights and the music surrounding me. I never even realised people coming in and watching me, until I turned around to find a spot to sit and there were half a dozen faces glancing at me with joy in their eyes. I had reached a point of balance. Or so I thought.

That night I couldn't sleep and found myself seeing images like stylised satellite images I could zoom in and out of, projected on a floating screen in front of total darkness. The strange thing was that nothing was fixed and kept moving, growing, shrinking, shifting. It was the most vivid set of images I had ever experienced. It took a long time for me to fall asleep.

And then I woke up again in the middle of the night – it was pitch black in my room – and at first I thought I was still dreaming: I was a pillar of light, sending out tendrils of light that solidified into ribbons, shaping themselves into intricate designs, then plants, animals, landscapes, planets, solar system, galaxies, ... the universe. And again, every element kept changing, and pulsating inwards and outwards with my heartbeat.

I was never religiously inclined, nor would I have described myself as spiritual, but this was a vision of sorts. I was torn between utter joy and absolute fear of the unknown: I saw everything. I felt everything. I was everything. And, at the same time, I was me.

Making sense and bringing it home

After a long time, dawn came, the sun started to rise and I could finally pull myself away from that paralysing state of joy and fear. Yet I was unable to shake that vision, it superseded what I saw with my eyes in front of me and I felt like I was moving in a trance. I was stopped in my tracks on the way to yoga by another man who pulled me aside, sat me down and asked me what was going on. I told him the whole story and that I was terrified and in limbo between joy and fear. He just turned around and looked at me, and said "Isn't this what we came here for?"

If I had been teetering on the abyss of fear, ready to embrace it before, I was now soaring with joy. He was right, so right! And that is how I let go of fear, once and for all.

I floated in the presence of joy for the rest of the festival, and that vision stayed with me long afterwards. Even today – four years later – I occasionally catch a glimpse of it with my eyes open, but most certainly with my eyes closed.

I took what I learned with me and was surprised to realise that even before the end of the festival I had taken a number of drastic decisions, including to quit my job, becoming self-employed instead, and to move from Belgium to Brighton. A fresh start. In a way those decisions were already within me, and it only took another perspective to make them real.

Why MenSensual?

I won't lie: it was and is hard to combine the ultimate experience with the nitty-gritty of daily work. Spiritual and sensual work is one thing, paying the bills is a completely different issue, and it remains a constant struggle to balance these two parts of me that seek, respectively, spiritual advancement and physical security.

MenSensual is a way to gently combine the two sides, but I'm enough of a realist to understand that I need to follow multiple routes at once to get bread on the table. One thing is still ongoing though: I'm letting go of a lot of stuff and a number of long-held beliefs I thought to be essential but really aren't.

I believe the best way to thank the people who guided me on my path, is to pay these lessons forward and make sure others can find their own path in the process. It's a journey, and I believe I have found my way. For now.