

Tonight is the opening in the Midwest of the Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel. I am happy about that. While I am sure it is not going to rival the cleverness and poignancy of the original movie, I know I will spend a couple of hours cheerfully engaged by the wonderful cast. I know that critics who are mostly in their 30's won't get most of what is going on. I have always noted that young critics may know lots about cinematography, scripting, and the people making movies, but they do not understand movies that have anything to do with aging - especially not with older women who have sexual or romantic feelings. Not that they should understand those things, but they may miss some of what is lovely in these two films. I may write about us older women in my next blog, after I see the film.

But in this blog I want to write about the first Exotic Marigold movie and what it had to say about depression. I was reflecting on that movie as I saw the trailers for the Second one. One of the catch phrases in that first film went something like, "Everything will be alright in the end. And if it is not alright, then it is not yet the end." There could not be a better concept to put into the mix with all of the other thoughts jostling around into ruminative mind of depression. Because in a depressed mind, we are not as able to see positives. We are not as able to move out of the rumination on the personal worthlessness or inadequacy that dogs us. We know things are not alright, but we do not expect they will be any different once we get to the end - whenever the end may be. That is because we are stuck in this here and now moment of hopeless and helpless circular thinking. We cannot move away from those thought to find out what might happen next.

Neurobiologically that stuckness makes sense. It is a feature of depression. It is hard to give up the dark mood and change the thinking. We all have felt that if we have been depressed. But there are some other features of the depressed mind that are relevant and the film is a metaphor for those. The Marigold Hotel is a place of the unexpected, the colorful, the tasty, the vividness of life. To the older English men and women who came there, it was quite foreign (yes, literally too.) But I was struck by how accurately that group of people portrayed the qualities of the mind of depression. When people are depressed, the ability to utilize their senses fully and respond to what they perceive is hampered by the depression. Food is less tasty, colors less bright, emotions are dulled, and generally there is less enthusiasm to encounter any thing at all that might raise them out of the gray, dull, sensory-deprived state of depression.

The first Exotic Marigold movie showed people encountering an extremely vivid world in India by comparison to the British one they left. The heat, the sensory stimulation, the newness of it all awakened the lot of them. It was a coming-out party - coming out of dullness into blindingly bright colors, tastes, sounds and emotions. But they did not come out of it easily. They came out gropingly, grudgingly, haltingly, and uncertainly. They had a guide though. Their guide was the young owner of the hotel who told them at every twist and turn, that it was not yet the end. He focused their attention on possibilities and re-directed them to see how they could have new experiences - and if it was not alright, there was more to come.

If you are suffering depression, you know first hand the sense of dullness that pervades

each day. Often nothing seems exciting enough to get out of bed for. And when you are depressed, it is likely that you are restricting your connections to things that are new, interesting, bright or intense. Those qualities do not seem to draw you into experiences. You need a guide who will tell you that all will be well in the end, so get out and see what can happen between now and then. The process is easier said than done, because depression robs you of the energy to take the first step, but that is where the right person can help to pull you out a little, until you get your own momentum going.

The steps to get to the place where it is alright start with:

1. Find a guide: Get a therapist, get in touch with that friend who said she would love to help you, call the family member who is always (annoyingly) checking in on you, because those are the people who care about you and will go the extra mile with you to find the positives you can encounter..

Then you need to encounter the things that will give you a burst of sensory stimulation. Your therapist/friend/family member guiding you should know that you need to stimulate your senses. They can go along with you and encourage you to try some of these ideas:

2. What can you do that is physically energizing? Can you go for a swim, take a zumba class, get yourself over to see what that rock-climbing wall is really like? Will you finally join the softball league this spring or maybe buy (and ride!) that motorcycle you have admired? What about just getting out into nature? Stroll through the park over your lunch hour or walk your dog for an extra 15 minutes. Maybe you just need to turn on the wii or take the clothes off the exercise bike and get riding. Moving your body takes energy but it gives you more energy than it expends. Exercise is the single best thing that will energize the depressed brain.
3. If you do not want to start there, no problem. Getting some sensory stimulation is essential. Make a list with your guide of things you are willing and able to do that will stir up your dulled senses.
 1. Taste: is there a restaurant you have been waiting to try? Just start to imagine it by reading menus and thinking about how fun it would be to finally taste that food. Then make a reservation to anticipate going. Half the fun of an event is anticipation. But maybe you are not enthused about restaurants: go to the grocery and pick out something that you see that will taste good to you. Bake cookies with a child. Waking up your senses can start with your tastebuds.
 2. Smell: what in your life smells fabulous? Do you own a cologne you love to wear or does someone around you have a scent that you love? Try to encounter that on them or carry a scented handkerchief.. How about just making sure there are good smells in your environment? Bring in some lilacs from the spring bushes, light a scented candle. Stimulate your sense of smell with brewing coffee or putting food in the slow cooker so that you walk into it one in the evening that smells of dinner.
 3. Skin: buy and use some wonderfully scented hand lotion, Better still take turns with your significant other rubbing lotion on each others' hands or

- backs. Get a massage. Go for a swim and get in the sauna or the hot tub. Feel things you wear: soft, cuddly, warm, silky. Notice the textures.
4. Sight: This can range from plucking a rose from the bush in your yard and putting it in a bud vase on your desk, to visiting an art museum, to looking at picture of your last vacation or getting the wedding picture up on the wall. But it may be bigger: walk outside and really see what your are gazing at. By all means, get some sun on your face! Being in a natural setting is soothing and also stimulating - so get your self out somewhere where there is green and water. Try a walk in the botanical garden or around the landscaped retention pond outside your corporate building: you don't have to travel to Yellowstone to get a glimpse of the natural world. If you are not a nature person then go to the mall. You can cover all the senses there: smell, touch and color, taste - it may not always be the best choice but it is certainly an easy way to get stimulated, as long as you don't make spending the goal of the sight-seeing.

The goal of the above ideas is to wake up the brain that has become mired in gray and dull. This an an outside-in change. Choosing to do something that will make you feel better instead of waiting to feel better in order to enjoy something. I plan to test that theory by going to see the Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, knowing I will enjoy the experience and vicarious enjoy the characters' experiences too.

And remember the message of the first Best Exotic Marigold Hotel: awaken to the wonders around you rather than staying stuck in the muck of the depressed senses. As you stimulate your spirit you may find that everything will be alright in the end. And, if at this moment it is not alright, then it is not yet the end.