

*Freedom from Fear:  
A Seven-Day Meditation Program*

IT'S EASY TO BECOME convinced of the value of meditation, generosity, patience, and so on. But what happens when, based on theory alone, you try to bring these qualities into everyday life? If you're like me, not much. I need to *practice* these skills over and over before they begin to make sense. The Freedom from Fear program is meant to lead you through the steps that create genuine and lasting change. Now is the time to put a stake in the ground, take action, and see how (or if) these ideas work in your life. You don't have to wait for the perfect day or until you quit smoking or lose ten pounds before you begin practicing meditation to cultivate gentleness, delight, confidence, and joy. The best time is now. Once you make the commitment to try, you'll be surprised to find support coming to you from everywhere you look.

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When you set out on the path, the path begins to materialize, but not before.

The Seven-Day Freedom from Fear Meditation Program in this chapter explains how to build meditation and a meditative point of view into your everyday life. It begins with an intensive, solitary thirty-six-hour retreat, and then includes four days back home where you weave Shamatha meditation, journaling exercises, and contemplative activities into your daily life.

I realize that finding the time and space to spend thirty-six hours by yourself is asking a lot. You can try this program without taking a thirty-six-hour break from your daily life, but not starting out this way will weaken the program's transformative power for you. Stepping outside the normal flow of your life offers very important perspective. Please try to find a way to give yourself this gift. You may have to get creative to make it happen, but you can do it. You totally deserve it.

Additionally, the idea of spending thirty-six hours alone may sound a little scary. The skills you've acquired thus far—a meditation practice, Maitri meditation, on-the-spot mindfulness exercises, and, I hope, deeper insight into the way your mind works—can help you through.

*Overview*

This program invites you to dive right into a meditation practice and experiment with working it into your

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everyday life through short, periodic practice sessions and daily contemplative exercises. As mentioned, the seven-day program begins with an intensive, thirty-six-hour retreat, during which you will separate yourself from your daily life and immerse yourself in meditation, journaling, and reflective practices. For the remaining four and one half days, you will return to your usual routine, but you will begin and end each day with some of the practices you have done intensely during your solo retreat. The idea is that you will become familiar with these practices and learn how to incorporate them into your everyday life.

*Before You Begin*

It will be really, incredibly, indescribably helpful if you begin a meditation practice *before* undertaking this program. This way, you'll have familiarized yourself with what it feels like to sit for ten to twenty minutes, how to take the posture in a way that's comfortable, and how to place your attention on your breath. When the seven-day program begins, you'll be able to settle in much more quickly.

I once heard the writer Julia Cameron say, "The first rule of magic is containment," and this is an important concept to bear in mind. Often we think that the way to begin a new program—whether it's a dietary change, a workout routine, or a spiritual practice—is to talk to some friends, read a few books, maybe take a

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class, and then give it a shot. But there is an additional element that is important to your success: the form you create to stabilize your efforts. Without the proper environment, the excitement and energy of a new endeavor can dissipate rather quickly.

*The schedule below is the container for this program.* It will create the form and structure that will allow the energy to build. Without this containment, there is no energy or magic. So following the program as carefully as you can is very important.

*The Retreat*

In order to take a decisive look at your fears and lay the foundation for fearlessness, some distance from everyday life is required. So, the program requires you to spend thirty-six hours, for instance, from 5:00 P.M. on day one until 1:00 P.M. on day three, alone. You'll step out of your life completely and spend one full day and two nights by yourself, with no contact with family, friends, or colleagues. This is very important. Often, our routines define our self-image and dictate what we think about and react to. During this thirty-six-hour period, you'll be thinking about and reacting to yourself—nothing else. You'll take a panoramic view of your own life. You'll give careful thought to what you're frightened of, the effect it has on your life, and who you might be without these fears. You'll immerse yourself in meditation and other contemplative prac-

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tices. You'll relax with yourself, by yourself, for yourself.

Before you begin, let those closest to you know you'll be engaged in this program for seven days. Ask for their understanding and support. Tell them you may not be able to respond to phone calls or e-mails immediately. As much as possible, prepare things in advance and lean on family, friends, or roommates to handle your usual daily chores. If you are responsible for grocery shopping, stock the pantry in advance. Find people to walk the dog, pick up the dry cleaning, or pay any bills that may come due in your absence. (At the end of the program, you can buy them a present or do something nice for them in return.)

Each day will end by dedicating the intent of your practice to others.

*Location*

The ideal spot to spend these thirty-six hours would be a spiritual retreat center or health spa—if it's within your budget and geographically convenient. These locations are specifically designed to support a contemplative lifestyle. (See "Meditation Resources" for a list of some centers.) Next best would be staying in a hotel for two nights. It doesn't matter (on the spiritual plane) if it's the Four Seasons or Motel 6. Another option would be house-sitting for two days or borrowing a vacationing

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friend's house. If you simply can't afford to leave your home for financial or familial reasons, maybe you can find a way to get the house to yourself for thirty-six hours. If none of these are options, not to worry. Perhaps you can commandeer the living room or even make your own room off-limits to others for the intensive period. If you're in a relationship, it won't kill your partner to sleep on the couch for two nights. Your roommates will survive if you decline going out with them for two nights. The idea is to create a safe, nurturing, and solitary space, free from everyday distractions and worries.

If you have no choice but to do this program at home, take special care to stash things that relate to your day-to-day responsibilities. This is not the time to catch up on bill paying or to go over the notes from the last staff meeting. Make sure that all of your favorite distractions are out of reach. This includes your computer, personal digital assistant, the television or radio, magazines, and as you'll see, all books except two.

If you aren't a fan of being alone, the prospect of thirty-six hours with yourself might seem daunting. If you think you need the support of others or just a bit of companionship so you won't go stir-crazy, this program gives you the chance to see if it's true. Facing your fear begins with facing yourself, which along with being scary, exhilarating, and possibly confusing and boring, can also be incredibly grounding. Avoid setting up little escape hatches, such as just one phone call to your boyfriend or a mere thirty minutes in

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front of the TV. It's important to dedicate yourself to this process wholeheartedly.

### *Right Space*

Creating the right space has nothing to do with setting up the perfect meditation spot or having the best incense. It has more to do with the ambient qualities your intention and discipline impart to your surroundings. Every space has its own feeling-tone, which informs what transpires in that space. If you hear a sad story in a church, it sounds different than it would in a bar or on a submarine. Waking up in a neat and orderly room engenders a different mood than waking up in an unkempt one. Walking through a field at night feels very different than walking through it at noon on a sunny day. Why? The answer is in the space itself. It's a very interesting concept. The space that contains the activity alters the direction of the activity, and vice versa.

### *Scheduling*

Find a time when you can get away for thirty-six hours, beginning at 5:00 P.M. one evening and ending at 1:00 P.M. two days later. If you can do so immediately—great. If it takes six months to find a break in your schedule, that's fine too. Putting it on the calendar actually sets the process in motion. Friday evening to

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Sunday lunch may work best, or you might want to wait until a holiday break and do it midweek.

*Program*

Each of the seven days in the program will include meditation, journaling, and various contemplative exercises. The first thirty-six hours introduce you to each of the practices and are considerably more intense. The remaining four and a half days will follow the same schedule: morning meditation, "free writing," a daily contemplation exercise, and an evening journaling assignment. It's very important to follow the schedule as it is laid out. It's better not to do the program unless you can commit to all seven days. The days are scheduled to build on one another, and if you limit them or spread them out, you will lose momentum. You can expect to go about your daily life but should be able to make time on each of these days for the practices suggested. In other words, choose a week when you expect little outside your regular routine, for example, try for a seven-day period without out-of-town guests or unusually important deadlines.

*Food*

The program has a dietary component, although not a complicated one: you don't have to give up meat, coffee,

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or sugar, or eat only organic vegetables, but please simplify the foods you eat during the retreat week and, if you can, for a few days in advance of the retreat start date, so you don't have to spend a lot of time during the retreat figuring out a new food shopping or preparation routine. This will leave you more energy to devote to the contemplative exercises.

For these seven days, the only rule is to eat high-quality foods. This means nothing packaged, processed, or genetically engineered. If you drink coffee, buy organic beans. If you want to eat candy bars, get some good-quality organic chocolate. If you must eat a ham sandwich for lunch every day, make it nitrate-free and on whole grain bread. Instead of sugared cereals for breakfast, try a granola that isn't too sweet. You'll be able to find what you need at a health food store, or do the best you can at your regular grocery store. For beverages, stick with water, milk, and fruit or vegetable juices. Avoid soda unless you'll spend the whole week with a headache if you don't get your diet cola. If you hate to cook and eat only takeout, buy your to-go food from a health-conscious establishment. If you're staying at a hotel where you can't control the food, either bring your own or order the healthiest things on the menu. (If you're fortunate enough to spend this time at a retreat center or health spa, you won't have to worry about the food.) This is not a diet by any means, and you don't have to get overly strict with yourself, but try to cut as many chemicals as you can from what you are eating. Doing so will leave your mind clearer.

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Also during this time, please use no alcohol or drugs, because these substances can make meditation very confusing. If you have an alcohol or drug problem or are undergoing medical or psychiatric treatment, please don't start this program. Consult your doctor and wait for a time when you are able to devote your attention to it fully.

If you are taking prescription medications, of course you should continue to take them, according to your doctor's instructions.

If you have any concern whatsoever about this program, please check with a health professional before beginning it.

*Supplies*

You'll need some supplies for the week. If you want, you can make a "retreat kit." Place these items in a beautiful gift box or purchase attractive wrapping paper to cover a regular cardboard box. The box should be big enough to hold the following:

- A blank journal
- Pens and/or pencils
- A small alarm clock
- A self-addressed, stamped envelope (to write a letter to yourself)
- Two books

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In addition to this book (which you'll need as a reference), plan to bring two others. Nothing about how to get over a broken heart or lose ten pounds in ten minutes, and no Harlequin romances or mystery novels. No self-help or guilty-pleasure books. Your books should be about meditation, spirituality, prayer, faith, or any other topic that will teach and inspire you as you make this inward journey. (When I first went on retreat, I took *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, and it was very helpful. I also enjoyed *Turning the Mind into an Ally* by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.)

I'm not suggesting these types of books because you need to be deadly serious during the retreat. I suggest them because they will help keep you focused and allow your mind to remain quiet. (See "Recommended Reading" for suggestions.)

SACRED OBJECT

Bring something that you feel represents the highest wisdom imaginable, your best self, or God. It could be a photo or statuette of a deity, a smooth stone from a walk or a vacation on which you felt particularly alive, or a picture of someone you greatly admire. It could be a flower, a shell, or a framed printout of a poem. Make it something of personal significance.

AN OFFERING

Also bring an offering to your own wisdom mind or highest self, as symbolized by your sacred object. There

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are many things you could choose to offer: the delicate scent of a candle or incense, a bouquet of fresh flowers, a treasured book, or a few river stones. You could offer a small dish of candy. It should be something simple.

WALKING SHOES

ART SUPPLIES (OPTIONAL)

If you like to draw or paint, you might want to bring colored pencils, charcoal, pens, or a small set of watercolors to use as you journal. Keep it simple.

PORTABLE AUDIO PLAYER (OPTIONAL)

If you can make a quiet playlist on your portable audio player and promise to listen to it only, then bring your tunes to listen to on your daily walk.



QUIET PLAYLIST

Taste in music is very personal, so what I find relaxing and beautiful, you might find boring. Whether you like Sinatra or Madonna, Bach or Wu-Tang Chan, choose slow-tempo, spare tunes.

Here's what works for me.

- Ammeh Kimia . . . . . *Jamshied Sharifi*
- Bach Unaccompanied Cello Suite No. 1 in G major,  
BWV 1007. . . . . *Yo-Yo Ma*
- Blue Gardenia . . . . . *Dinah Washington*

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Body and Soul . . . . . *Mel Tormé*  
 Change Is Gonna Come . . . . . *Sam Cooke*  
 Copperline . . . . . *James Taylor*  
 Funny How Time Slips Away. . . . . *Willie Nelson*  
 In a Landscape . . . . . *William Orbit*  
 Indigo Burrell . . . . . *Ronnie Earl*  
 In the Evening (When the Sun Goes Down) . . . . *Ella Fitzgerald*  
 Kothbiro . . . . . *Ayub Ogada*  
 Live to Tell . . . . . *Madonna*  
 Mary . . . . . *Patty Griffin*  
 Moonlight in Vermont . . . . . *Johnny Hartman*  
 My Funny Valentine . . . . . *Chet Baker*  
 My One and Only Love . . . . . *John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman*  
 On the Other Hand. . . . . *Randy Travis*  
 'Round Midnight . . . . . *Mel Tormé*  
 Satta Massagana . . . . . *The Abyssinians*  
 Someone to Watch over Me. . . . . *Frank Sinatra*  
 Tabula Rasa . . . . . *Arvo Pärt (various performers)*  
 The Way You Look Tonight . . . . . *Tony Bennett*  
 Trouble Man . . . . . *Marvin Gaye*  
 Wichita Lineman . . . . . *Glen Campbell*  
 You Are Too Beautiful . . . . . *John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman*  
 You Changed My Life . . . . . *Charles Brown*  
 You Don't Know What Love Is . . . . . *Dinah Washington*



**YOGA MAT (OPTIONAL)**

If you have a yoga practice, by all means, bring a mat.  
But no DVDs. Remember, you won't be watching TV

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at all. If you want to do yoga, do the poses you know and are comfortable performing. Re-create the sequence of the poses from memory or as feels best to you.

**MEDITATION CUSHION (OPTIONAL)**

If you have a meditation cushion, you could bring that. If not, you can use a chair, sofa cushions, or even the bed as your meditation spot.

Don't overthink your selections. Go with your gut, and you'll find you have what you need when you need it. Keep this simple and relaxed.

When you have chosen a start date, gathered your supplies, and figured out how to meet your dietary needs, you're ready to begin.

## THE PROGRAM

### *Day One: The Day of Slowing Down*

*Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened but go on  
in fortune or misfortune at their own private pace,  
like a clock during a thunderstorm.*

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

All spiritual practice begins with slowing down, letting the concerns of everyday life drop away, and turning one's attention inward. This evening, allow your body to slow down. If you're not at home, don't rush through unpacking. When you sit down to journal or meditate, take your seat gently. Don't multitask. Do one thing at a time. Breathe deeply. Allow your mind to expand. Know that, for the next thirty-six hours, you're going to let it rest quietly. When body and mind slow down, the spirit comes forward.

As you begin the program, realize that learning these practices could mark a turning point in your life, so really go for it. "Leap, and the net will appear," as the saying goes. You can trust that when you take your first step, even if it appears to be into thin air, the net begins readying itself to catch you. The leap and the net come into existence at the same time.

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So as you do this inner work, the world around you seems magically to create the circumstances and coincidences that will support you best.

## 5:00–6:00 P.M. SET UP

Whether you're in your bedroom, a friend's house, a hotel, or a retreat center, do what you can to make sure your space will be available by 5:00 P.M. There is nothing magical about 5:00 P.M., but it's helpful to have a clearly delineated start time and to begin your retreat with a sense of discipline. If you're using your bedroom, make sure that you've cleaned up and put away distracting or irritating things. Make sure you have the groceries you'll need for the entire thirty-six hours. If you're going to a friend's house, take care to have checked out and prepared the space beforehand. Come a little early to do so, but be ready by 6:00 P.M.

If you're at a hotel, ask that your room be in a quiet spot. Unplug the telephone. Turn off your cell phone and stash it. Cover the TV with a blanket, or swivel it around to face a wall. When you shut the door, your space should feel good—safe, but maybe a little exciting.

Unpack your retreat box. Create a shrine by placing the object that represents your highest wisdom somewhere neat and clean. A bookshelf, bedside table, or windowsill is good. Since this object represents what is most precious to you, you don't want to place it on the floor, in a closet, or amid a bunch of cookie crumbs. Next, place your offering next to or in front of your

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item. Do so with a sense of gratitude for this gift of solitude and quiet.

Choose a place for your meditation. It could be facing your shrine or not. If you have a cushion, set it up in a clean and, if possible, out-of-the-way spot. If this isn't possible, it's no big deal. Simply decide where you're going to sit and be prepared to set your cushion there during meditation periods. If you aren't using a traditional cushion, decide whether you'll be sitting on a chair, a sofa, or the bed. If you've chosen a chair or sofa, make sure it's one you can sit up straight in, back unsupported, feet on the floor. If you're going to sit on the bed, figure out a way to stack pillows so that you can sit comfortably but upright. You could sit cross-legged or on the edge of the bed or with your feet on the floor. If your feet don't reach the floor, stack some pillows or cushions under them to bring your knees level with or slightly above your hips.

Unpack your clothes, toiletries, groceries, and so on.

6:00–7:00 P.M. JOURNALING, DINNER,  
CLEANUP, WALK

Open your journal. For your first journaling exercise, take about twenty minutes (or longer if you wish) to make note of what your senses are able to take in. For now, leave your feelings behind, forget about whatever motivated you to do this program, and look around you. What are your surroundings like? What type of furniture does this room contain? What are you sitting

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or lying on, and how does it feel? Is it comfortable? What colors can you see? What can you smell or hear? How does it feel to be in this room—not how do *you* feel, but how does *the room* feel—is it serene, jumbled, warm, plain? Does it feel like a happy, unhappy, or neutral place to be?

Note how your body feels. Scan from your feet to your head, and jot down whatever you notice. “The bottoms of my feet hurt. My back is so comfortable against these pillows. My chest feels warm. My eyeglasses are pinching the bridge of my nose a tiny bit.” And so on. This is a way of attuning to your environment and settling into it by making contact with its energy through the placement of your attention. When you’re finished, set your journal aside and get ready for dinner.

Dinner should either be prepared already or easy to prepare. Whether you cooked in advance, picked up takeout, or need to cook now, keep it simple and nourishing. It shouldn’t take more than thirty minutes to prepare, nor should it be a bag of cookies or chips. Eat something you know is basically good for you. As you eat, you can read one of the books you brought, or do nothing but taste your food.

Clean up.

Take a twenty-minute walk unless it’s freezing cold or you’re in a dangerous neighborhood. Walk around the block. Take your time. This walk isn’t meant to be athletic. Walking is an uncomplicated way to connect with your body and digest your food. If you’re on familiar turf and you have a portable audio player, you

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can listen to your quiet playlist while you walk. Otherwise, pay attention to your breath and take in your surroundings.

7:00—10:00 P.M. JOURNALING,  
RELAXATION, SLEEP

Get your journal out again and make yourself comfortable. During this exercise, you'll be turning your attention inward to begin a dialogue with yourself. The following sentences are like little prayers, requesting the blessings of whomever or whatever you believe to be the source of blessings. If you have no such beliefs, this is fine. If it's more comfortable to you, don't think of them as prayers but look at them as markers that set your intentions in motion, little ways of telling yourself the truth about what's on your mind. What you write should be fairly simple and straightforward. Don't rush, but don't spend an inordinate amount of time finding the perfect words either. Write what comes to mind. You can always tweak this later.

Please help me to \_\_\_\_\_ so that I may \_\_\_\_\_.  
Please guide me to \_\_\_\_\_ so that I may \_\_\_\_\_.  
Please show me \_\_\_\_\_ so that I may \_\_\_\_\_.  
Please teach me \_\_\_\_\_ so that I may \_\_\_\_\_.

Here are some examples of things you might say:

Please help me to quit smoking so that I may be healthy.

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Please guide me to the people or circumstances who  
can help me find a job doing work I really love so  
that I may express myself fully.

Please show me how to talk with my sister so that I  
may stop fighting with her.

Please teach me how to have confidence so that I may  
ask for what I'm worth.

Keep it simple, but if you're inspired to elaborate,  
feel free. You can use a sentence a page, explaining  
each item. Whether or not you elaborate, be sure to  
fill in the blanks.

Now, dedicate your prayers or wishes so that they  
may serve others too. If it's helpful, go back to page 63  
and reread the explanation of the dedication of merit.  
Spend a few moments composing your wish that what-  
ever benefit may have accrued through these exercises  
also be put to work for the benefit of others. It can be  
as simple as "I hope that what I learn can serve oth-  
ers," "I don't know how, but may my work here be  
helpful to others," or "I dedicate whatever good has  
arisen today to a higher power."

You could use the following traditional verses as a  
dedication of merit if you like:

By this merit may all attain omniscience.

May it defeat the enemy, wrongdoing.

From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness,  
and death,

From the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings.

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The important thing is that your generosity be genuine. Touch in with the natural tenderness you experienced during Maitri meditation, and let your words emanate from that feeling.

Now read either of the books you've brought or relax until bedtime.

Try to get to sleep by 10:00 or 11:00.

*Day Two: The Day of Self-Remembering*

*But when the self speaks to the self, who is speaking?—the entombed soul, the spirit driven in, in, in to the central catacomb; the self that took the veil and left the world.*

—VIRGINIA WOOLF

In the rush of everyday life, in trying to meet the demands of family, work, and health, we simply forget who we are. While returning phone calls, reading e-mail, doing errands, taking care of others, *trying* to take care of self—we don't have time to remember who we are. Our energy is continually going out, directed at people and tasks. Today, you turn that energy around and direct it to yourself. With great respect, appreciation, and dignity, turn inward. Let today be the quietest day of your life.

7:00–7:30 A.M.

Wake up. Fix your coffee or tea.

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20 MINUTES

Go to your meditation spot. Take your small alarm clock and this book, if you want to review the meditation instructions before practicing. I've included a refresher on Shamatha practice here. If you have brought a candle or incense, light it. Take a few moments to settle in and find the correct posture. When you feel that you're ready, set your alarm clock for twenty minutes and begin to practice. When the alarm sounds, turn it off and sit for a few moments before you rise.

Dedicate the merit.



## SHAMATHA INSTRUCTIONS

Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit. If you are planning to sit on a cushion on the floor, dress in comfortable, loose-fitting clothing.

Minimize distractions.

Take your seat and review the points of posture: Sit on an even surface, legs crossed comfortably or feet flat on the floor (if on a chair); back is straight but relaxed, hands are resting on the thighs, palms down, eyes are open but soft, gaze is forward and down to a spot a few feet in front of you, mouth is closed but lips are slightly parted.

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Before beginning the actual practice, remind yourself what you are doing, that you are about to meditate, that you will give it your all, and that during this brief time everything else can wait. Now you are ready to start.

**8:00—8:30 A.M. FREE WRITING**

*If you look into your mind, you will see it's like thousands of butterflies whirling about! You can hardly trace a single idea in this complexity. A way to bring clarity to the mind is to write down your immediate thoughts and feelings in response to the events of the day, and then ponder them.*

*If you emphasize one particular problem in this writing, it will gradually lead to all others.*

—J. KRISHNAMURTI

You'll need your pen and journal for the exercise. Sit comfortably on a chair, the sofa, or your bed. This journaling exercise is called free writing, automatic writing, or as named by Julia Cameron in her book *The Artist's Way*, "morning pages." You will write three pages—whatever comes to mind, write it down. Simply keep your hand moving across the page, and don't worry about making your words elegant, grammatical, or sensible. There is no need to be logical. Just keep going. If you can't think of anything to write, just write "I can't think of anything to write" for three

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pages. Free writing has a number of purposes: It clears the head of gobbledygook, lets you know what mood you're in right now, offers solutions to problems, gives space for whining and complaining, and connects you directly to your most creative impulses. Writing three pages should take about thirty minutes. No one will ever read these pages. You don't ever have to read them either.

Free writing is a powerful tool—it teaches you how to listen within yourself and trust what arises. Our minds are usually speedy and busy. This exercise slows your thinking down, thought by thought. As you continue to tune in, you will be able to hear all your different voices: encouraging, shaming, wise, childish, brave, and insecure. There are dozens of voices, making dozens of yous, including a you that grew up believing what your teachers or parents said, a you that urges you forward, protects you from pain, believes you are lovable, or jeers at you from the sidelines. Through attention, they begin to separate out. Through your writing, you can learn how they speak (like a child, a stern aunt, or your best girlfriend) and what brings them forward in your inner dialogue. In free writing, you can begin to hear the voices “talk” to one another, engaging in long-standing feuds (the part who believes you're lovable versus the part who jeers at you), creating escape routes (your risk taker versus the one who keeps you safe), and figuring out how to love (codependent you versus warrior goddess you).

As you get to know yourself, you will find—

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invariably, there are no exceptions—wisdom you had no idea you possessed. It comes forward when you least expect it to point you in the right direction, tell you whether or not to stay in school or take a job, help figure out if falling in love with so-and-so is a brilliant move or a confused one, teach you to distinguish what brings healing from what reinforces neurosis. Sometimes your writing will be one whine after another or endless to-do lists. But if you make three pages of writing a daily practice, and if your inner wisdom knows you will keep the appointment, it will show up for you. The only rule is to begin the practice *without agenda*. Simply sit down, pick up your journal, and start writing. Writing longhand engages this process more than writing at the computer. It is more intimate and relaxed, and it forces you to slow down.

It takes practice to hear your best self, and you certainly can't force it to happen, but if you are patient and respectful, your inner wisdom will come out. It wants to come out when the ground has been prepared properly, and somehow, disciplined practice is that proper preparation. Claudio Naranjo, a pioneer of the Human Potential Movement, once said, "Only repetition invites spontaneous variation." This is a wonderful description of the fruits of discipline. It's only by playing the same piece over and over again that the musician learns to improvise skillfully.

Here are a few recent examples from my free-writing journal that illustrate how the practice begins. If I can embarrass myself this way, so can you.

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*As usual, I'm kind of late getting to what is most important. I feel a little speedy—maybe in part because yesterday was such a buzz. In deep conversation with PR. Very motivating conversation with Michael. Had a short interview. A lot of talking, which made me tired. When I click on conversation with PR, I feel full and safe for some reason. Odd because the conversation was about shadowy things. But it makes me feel connected up somehow. I should make note of that idea I had after I hung up the phone yesterday. I have an endless list of boring things to do today. . . .*

*4-26-06*

*It's very, very cold where I'm sitting right now, on a platform waiting for the train to NYC. A very chilly April morning and I feel very nervous. Am looking forward to going shopping this afternoon. I want to look good. Have to consider how to answer Lisa's questions. I can talk about it in simple, everyday terms without being fake, superficial, or egg-heady. Tomorrow I have to co-teach that course. It's the first class. When will I have time to do the reading I'm supposed to do? I can get to it after lunch, should have a little break. I have to figure out a better way to treat the things that are most important. Shouldn't just shoehorn them. It would be great to slow down, or to even know how. . . .*

*4-27-06*

*Oh it is so lovely to wake up in the morning and start the day in complete quiet. It just feels so good and safe to me. So enjoyable and relaxed and there are so many possibilities. Here's my flash on their response to the articles I wrote. I think they think it's decent. But do I think it's substantial enough? Getting ready for breakfast with Rob, I*

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*hope his kids are okay. It was so fun to work with him on those music projects and I want to remember to lend him that book. Oh no I hope I'm not getting a headache, I really, really want to have a lot of energy today. . . .*

I'm sure you get the idea. My writing almost always starts out in this vein. But in the ten years I've been doing this exercise, it usually (not always) happens that somewhere within these three pages, I tell myself something important—a cool idea, a smart solution, or unspoken feelings. This happens probably 80 percent of the time. In the other 20 percent, I have run the gamut from making endless to-do lists to suddenly encountering an enormous reservoir of rage, grief, or disappointment. I've also heard the voice of someone who is unbelievably petty and that of someone who is shockingly profound. You never know.

8:30–10:30 A.M. BREAKFAST, CLEANUP,  
RELAXATION

I mean really relax. If you do yoga, unfurl your mat and do some stretches or, even better, restorative poses. Read for pleasure. Go back to sleep. Let yourself slow down.

10:30–11:30 A.M. JOURNALING EXERCISE:  
PART 1

Questions are a way of focusing attention. Focusing attention in the present moment is a way of connecting with genuine wisdom. Think about each question

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until you sense its personal meaning for you, and then begin writing. You can make your answers as short as a sentence or as long as you like. After you're done, set the answers aside. We'll come back to them at the end of the program.

1. What three things do I love about myself?
2. What three things scare me about myself?
3. How can I honor my body? How do I honor my body?
4. What can't I say?
5. What can't I feel?
6. What do I want written on my tombstone?
7. Who do I need to forgive?
8. Who needs to forgive me?
9. What is unfolding in my life right now?
10. Who are my true friends?

11:30 A.M.—12:00 P.M. SHAMATHA

MEDITATION: 20 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

12:00—3:00 P.M. LUNCH, CLEANUP,  
RELAXATION

3:00—3:30 P.M. SHORT WALK

3:30—4:00 P.M. SHAMATHA MEDITATION:  
20 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

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4:00–5:00 P.M. JOURNALING EXERCISE:

PART 2

11. What is unmourned in my life?
12. What really ignites me, if I let it?
13. How do I manipulate others?
14. What are my addictions?
15. Who have I been listening to that I shouldn't?
16. Who haven't I been listening to that I should?
17. What aspirations am I not allowing myself to manifest?
18. What fears are ruling my life and how I make decisions? About love? Sex? Money?
19. What am I doing to preserve comfort? Get approval? Earn love?
20. What is difficult for me to receive? Offer?
21. What can't I admit about myself?

5:00–7:00 P.M. DINNER, CLEANUP,  
RELAXATION

7:00–7:30 P.M. SHORT WALK

7:30–8:00 P.M. SHAMATHA MEDITATION:  
20 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

8:00–10:00 P.M. READ,  
RELAXATION

Asleep by 10:00 or 11:00 P.M.

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### *Day Three: The Day of Intention*

*A good intention clothes itself with sudden power.*

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Today marks a transition. As you go through the activities of the morning, let the solo part of your retreat go. Don't try to hold on to it or run away from it too quickly. Use the writing exercises to remind yourself of your motivations, wishes, and aspirations in bringing meditation practice home.

The final meditation session before you go home (or back to your everyday schedule) includes Maitri or loving-kindness meditation. This is to help make sure to include others in your efforts.

7:00–7:30 A.M. WAKE UP. FIX YOUR  
COFFEE OR TEA.

7:30–8:15 A.M. SHAMATHA MEDITATION:  
30 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

Note that this session is a little bit longer.

8:15–9:00 A.M. FREE WRITING.  
USE THIS PROMPT: WHAT I NEED TO TELL  
MYSELF TODAY IS . . .

Just for today, use this prompt to get yourself started writing. Write whatever pops into your mind. For some reason, it's helpful to write quickly, perhaps because

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doing so helps to bypass your inner critic. Don't worry if you make a few false starts when writing with a prompt. Just keep trying. (This free writing session is a bit longer to provide time for experimentation.)

9:00–10:00 A.M. BREAKFAST, CLEANUP

10:00–11:00 A.M. SHAMATHA AND MAITRI  
MEDITATION

This morning, make Maitri (loving-kindness) meditation your practice. Begin and end with ten minutes of Shamatha. After you've sat for about ten minutes, start your Maitri practice. I've included a refresher on Maitri practice here. When your Maitri meditation is over, resume Shamatha for ten minutes or as long as you like.

Dedicate the merit.



MAITRI INSTRUCTIONS

Remember, in this practice you touch your own natural tenderness and begin extending it out in wider and wider circles, first to yourself, then to a loved one, then to a friend, then to a stranger, to an enemy, and finally to all beings. This practice can be done seated in formal meditation posture, sitting in an easy chair, or lying in bed. Eyes can be open or closed.

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Begin with yourself. See yourself in your mind's eye and think for a moment about how hard you work to create happiness for yourself and others, make a living, express yourself, accomplish something in this life. You make so much effort. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, but somehow you keep trying. With these thoughts in mind, allow yourself to wish for your own happiness. Say to yourself, silently:

May I be happy.  
May I be healthy.  
May I be peaceful.  
May I live with ease.

These phrases are used in traditional Maitri meditation practice. If these words don't feel quite right to you, you can substitute others.

Let your awareness of yourself and your efforts to be happy fade. Bring someone you love to mind, someone who, when you think of him, causes your heart to soften. It could be a parent, partner, child, or dear friend. If you can't think of anyone who makes you feel this way, bring to mind a pet or a character in a book or movie who has moved you. Think about how hard this person has tried to create happiness, how he has struggled and worked. Then send this loved one the loving-kindness phrases:

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May you be happy.  
May you be healthy.  
May you be peaceful.  
May you live with ease.

Next, bring to mind a friend. It doesn't have to be your best friend, although it could be. This should be a person who has been kind or helpful to you or let you lean on her. Think about her efforts to be happy and send the phrases to her.

After this, call a stranger's face to mind and wish him well too. It's totally possible to wish someone well when you don't know him.

Now think of an enemy—someone who has wronged you. Let your enemy's face come to mind. Know that this person too is just trying to be happy, no matter how strange her attempts may look to you. Send her the phrases, and try to really mean it.

In the last stage of the practice, let any particular person go. Realize that all the people in the world have friends and enemies, people they love, and those they are indifferent to. Each of these people, every single one, is trying to find happiness. All creatures are. Take a few minutes and wish that all beings could be happy.

Dedicate the merit.

Let the practice go, and relax for a few moments before getting up.



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11:00–11:30 A.M. SHORT WALK

11:30 A.M.–1:00 P.M. A LETTER  
TO YOURSELF

Get out your journal or a piece of paper and write a letter to yourself. In your letter, describe how you're feeling and what you may have learned about yourself or noticed about your life during this retreat. Review any feelings, discoveries, delights, and irritations that have come up during this time of solitude. Go over the lists of questions you answered and circle the five most important questions, the ones you don't want to forget. Make note of any ideas or emotions you'd like to explore further. You could voice your wishes about your life, remind yourself of all the things you're doing that you're proud of, or express yourself about anyone or anything you like. You could encourage yourself to be strong and brave in whatever areas you think you need such encouragement. The letter could be one sentence or twenty pages long.

Now turn to the requests you created during the first journaling exercise (see page 163). Do they strike you any differently? Would you like to change the wording of any of your answers? Add additional requests? Once you feel satisfied with your sentences, tear this page out of your journal or write all the sentences on a new piece of paper. Put your request with the letter you wrote to yourself in a self-addressed, stamped envelope, find a mailbox, and send it to yourself before you return to your regular life.

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At this point, your solitary retreat is over. I salute you! It takes a lot of planning, not to mention courage, to pull something like this off. It's daunting to devote yourself to a period of intensive introspection. I'm so glad you were willing to take this chance. Congratulations!

As you pack up to leave (or transition your space back to its original purpose), go slowly. If you begin to feel emotionally unsteady, know that this is very natural. (But if not, it doesn't mean you've missed the impact of the retreat!) Being in a protected, quiet space can provide relief from the hassles and problems you face in daily life. Going back to your normal routine can feel like a loss. Retreat participants may also feel sad because they think they'll never be able to reestablish this contemplative atmosphere in their everyday lives.

If you're feeling sad or worried, there are a few things you can do. Most important, remind yourself that you can trust this process and the practices you've learned. They've been around for thousands of years, and millions of people have had their lives transformed by them. If you stick with it, meditation will transform yours. And be gentle with yourself. Try not to zoom back to normal speed right away. If possible, give yourself the opportunity to ramp up to your normal responsibilities slowly. Most important, when you get home (or restore your home to its normal state), sit down on a chair, your bed, or your meditation

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cushion and meditate. It doesn't matter if you practice for five minutes or thirty minutes, making the effort immediately to establish your meditation practice at home base is a powerful gesture. So don't unpack, don't check messages, and don't start making grocery lists. Sit in Shamatha meditation for a few minutes first, and then resume your ordinary routine as you like.

15 MINUTES BEFORE BED AT HOME:  
JOURNALING

Recap how it was to make the transition back home.

Shamatha Meditation: 20 minutes

Dedicate the merit.

*Day Four: The Day of Change*

*I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn  
how to do it.*

—PABLO PICASSO

The first day after your solo retreat is for focusing on bringing what you've learned home and beginning to integrate meditation and contemplation into your daily life. Take it slow. Don't be discouraged if you don't feel transformed or if bringing meditation into your life is more difficult than you thought it would be. Remember who you are and what prompted you to begin this program. Remember what you discovered

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on your solo retreat and how important those discoveries are to you.

7:00–7:30 A.M. (OR TWEAK IF NEEDED  
FOR YOUR SCHEDULE) SHAMATHA  
MEDITATION: 20 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

7:30–8:15 A.M. FREE WRITING

TODAY: CONTEMPLATE A PRECEPT

In Buddhism, the Five Precepts represent the five first commitments you make to the spiritual path. These are vows not to kill, steal, lie, engage in inappropriate sexual conduct, or use various intoxicants. Without adhering to the precepts, it's said, it is pretty much impossible to progress along the path. I'm not suggesting you *commit* to the precepts, only examine their presence in your life.

The precepts sound pretty straightforward, but when you start to focus on them, they become a bit more complicated. Take lying, for example. You may think of yourself as a fairly truthful person. I do. Nonetheless, when I started paying attention, I found that I was lying all the time. I would refer to something that happened "last year," when it really happened five years ago. Or I would tell my husband, "I'll be right home," when I *knew* I was going to spend another hour at the office but I thought telling him would upset him and I didn't want to get into it. These untruths aren't the

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worst things in the world, but they create a kind of gray film on everyday interactions. Most of the time, I tell these little lies because I'm too lazy to think for the extra second about how to be precise or how to respect others by telling them the truth despite what I think their reaction might be. But these types of lies are sneaky. When you start paying attention to how you may obscure the truth, you can begin to hold yourself to a higher standard of mindfulness and greater effort.

The precept "Don't kill" has its own set of complications. I'm sure you're not running around stabbing people or taking aim at pigeons, but if you bring your attention to this precept throughout the day, you might find small infringements. Every spring, ants mount an initiative to occupy the bottom floor of our house, and every spring I fight with myself about killing them. This kind of killing counts as a trespass against the precept, but at some point I allow myself to get careless about stepping over or around the ants because I'm just so sick of having them in the house. You may eat at a restaurant that serves shellfish which was probably still alive right before it was on your plate.

Of course, we destroy things all the time in ways we have no idea about—we step on bugs we haven't seen, our cars emit fumes that kill trees or birds. We can't possibly watch out for all these precepts violations. But focusing your awareness on the way life and death are continually cycling in and out of very mundane circum-

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stances brings a heightened sense of the preciousness of life. Stopping to think about extending respect to all living creatures can make us more respectful of our own lives as well.

The other precepts operate with similar subtlety: When you borrow some file folders from a colleague without telling her, is that stealing? If you continue to find excuses to hang around your best friend's husband because you think he's cute, is that inappropriate sexual conduct? And while you may not drink or take drugs, what are you doing when you eat a cupcake or turn on the television to distract yourself from something upsetting?

So pick a precept and begin paying attention to how you follow it or break it throughout the day. You don't have to adhere to the precept or make any changes in your life. In fact, it's better if you don't, because if you are trying to change, your mind won't be open to taking in your actual experience.

6:00–6:30 P.M. SHAMATHA MEDITATION:  
20 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

**BEFORE BED: JOURNALING**

Journal about the precept you chose. What and where did you notice its themes today? Did you notice it affecting your thoughts or actions? If you had taken the precept formally, would you have broken it today? Where?

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## *Day Five: The Day of Heart Opening*

*My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.*

—DALAI LAMA

When the body slows down and the mind turns inward, the heart naturally and gracefully expands. Tenderness and care for others become a joy for the self. Today is devoted to touching in with this truth.

6:50–7:30 A.M. SHAMATHA MEDITATION:  
30 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

Start a little earlier and increase your practice by ten minutes.

7:30–8:15 A.M. FREE WRITING

TODAY: CONTEMPLATE A PARAMITA

Contemplate one of the paramitas, the six actions that support fearlessness. Refer to Chapter 7 to refresh your memory of the meaning of generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation, and wisdom. As you did with the precepts, choose one, say generosity, and notice where it appears or is lacking as you move through your day. If you chose generosity, notice who arouses your generosity easily, and with whom it becomes difficult. Notice the generous or ungenerous gestures of friends, colleagues, even strangers or people on TV.

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## 6:00–6:30 P.M. MAITRI MEDITATION

For this evening's meditation, practice Maitri (loving-kindness). Begin and end with two or three minutes of Shamatha.

Remember, in Maitri meditation you get in touch with your own natural tenderness and begin extending it out in wider and wider circles, first to yourself, then to a loved one, then to a friend, then to a stranger, to an enemy, and finally, to all beings.

## BEFORE BED: JOURNALING

Journal about the paramita you chose. What were your observations about how it appeared (or didn't) in your day?

*Day Six: The Day of Friendship*

*A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.*

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Today your focus is going to be on appreciation for those who have shown you kindness. Remember the journaling exercise you did back on Day Two? One of the questions was "Who are my true friends?" You may have listed a dozen names, or none, or maybe just that of your pet. It doesn't matter. Today you're going to consider the topic of friendship.

*Kalyanamitra* is a Sanskrit word meaning "spiritual friend." A spiritual friend is someone who offers you a chance to deepen your spirituality. A spiritual friend

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can come in the form of a very generous and encouraging person who has taught you a lot. But it can also be a person who has caused you pain and forced you to grow spiritually. For example, I consider the boyfriend who broke my heart to be a spiritual friend. I certainly didn't feel that way at the time, but now I know that this experience gave me a glimpse into the illusory nature of emotional suffering. So, if you benefited from someone by learning something, seeing things more clearly, or becoming more devoted to loving-kindness, then this person was a kalyanamitra.

6:50–7:30 A.M. SHAMATHA MEDITATION:  
30 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

7:30–8:15 A.M. FREE WRITING

Make a list of the people from whom you have learned the most. It may have been through a good experience or a difficult one, in the past or in the present. Choose one or two people, and bring their faces to mind. You are going to write each of them a letter of gratitude, but before doing so, pause to give thought to the nature of their kindness. Let yourself feel what it was like to have received what they brought to you. Tell them what you learned, how you learned it, and how it helped you. Explain to them the impact this has had on your life. Offer your appreciation to them. You can choose to mail your letters, or not.

Go about your day as usual.

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6:30–7:00 P.M. SHAMATHA OR  
MAITRI MEDITATION

Dedicate the merit.

*Day Seven: The Day of Commitment*

*If you do not change direction, you may end up where  
you are heading.*

—LAO TZU

6:50–7:30 A.M. SHAMATHA MEDITATION:  
30 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

7:30–8:30 A.M. FREE WRITING  
AND JOURNALING

In addition to free writing, take some time to journal about what has occurred in the last seven days. What were your expectations before you began? How have they been confirmed or altered? Think back to your thirty-six hours of solitude. What was that experience like? What has it been like to meditate every day? Has it been difficult to make the time? Easy? How has it felt to consciously bring spirituality to your everyday life? What have you learned about yourself or those who are important to you? What are your intentions regarding your spiritual practice going forward?

Go about your day as usual.

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6:00–6:30 P.M. SHAMATHA OR  
MAITRI MEDITATION

Dedicate the merit.

6:30–7:00 P.M. OFFERING OF  
GRATITUDE

To close your seven-day program, take a few moments to make an offering of gratitude. You could offer gratitude to those who made it possible for you to do this program; to your family or friends who supported you emotionally or by taking some of your responsibilities off your hands. You could give thanks by writing them a note, giving them a gift, or simply thinking good thoughts of them and wishing them well.

You could offer gratitude to yourself for putting in this effort. A program such as this demands a lot of focus. You may have confronted difficult and painful feelings; you may have taught yourself how to let go, enjoy stillness. It takes courage to embark on a journey such as this. Thank yourself for making this happen.

You could offer gratitude to the wisdom that animates all existence: God, Self, Being. Give thanks for the seen and unseen support that surrounds you.

Finally, dedicate the merit of this entire week to the greatest good. Know that, as you return to your everyday life, you are doing so from a position of increased strength and vulnerability. Go slow.

## AFTERWORD

THE PROCESS OF WRITING this book has given me ample opportunity to work with my own fears. I've spent many hours dancing around with self-doubt and the possibility of rejection. Writing it has meant moving from my seat in the back of the meditation hall to the "teacher's cushion" up front, and doing so has felt quite uncomfortable. Am I being a show-off? Do I really know anything? How dare I presume to speak on these topics? Finding my daring required me to shift my vantage point considerably, and therefore my expectations about my own voice and what it would say. I began the process with the sense of embarking on a noble challenge. I would only find out if I could do this work after it was finished.

At first, the words flowed out onto the page. I've spent more than a decade ruminating on the wisdom of Buddhism (the "Buddha-dharma") and witnessing

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it mix with and change my life, so I knew there was a lot of material to work with. I felt that trying to write on this topic was making good use of my practice. Although I certainly hoped that the book would be good for you, the reader, I knew it would be great for me; I would have the opportunity to metabolize what I've been taught and then crystallize it into words for others' benefit. This seemed like the best possible thing I could do with my life.

As I always do when working on a project, I came to my office every day, sat in front of the computer, and waited to see what would come out. I wrote piece after piece, the way one who is making a quilt creates patches. Because I don't work well with outlines, I trusted that when I was ready to lay them out together, the pieces would connect easily through a wisdom greater than my own. This was what had always happened before.

It didn't happen this time. The first attempt to sequence the pieces of writing left me feeling like Shelley Duvall in *The Shining* when she looks at Jack Nicholson's book and sees that it consists of "All work and no play make Jack a dull boy" typed out thousands of times.

I felt what I had written was a bunch of gibberish. The months of work seemed wasted, and I felt foolish to have presumed to write on this topic. How could I possibly sound more vacuous and poseur-like? I was such a loser. I ran out of my office and drove home, sobbing and shaking. I felt that I had failed myself, my publisher, and my teachers. I began compiling lists of people I could call for advice, frantically scanned suc-

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cessful books for their secret formulas, and finally, collapsed on the couch with *Seinfeld* reruns. (Not that there's anything wrong with that.)

The next morning, I awoke feeling numb and heavy. I drove to my office in anguish, gut clenched and hands gripping the steering wheel. How would I ever make this mess into something coherent, and how would I meet my deadline? I unlocked the door and looked at the past week's collection of dog-eared books, scribbled Post-it notes, and unwashed teacups. I wanted to run away. I thought to myself, How can I possibly get back to work? I am so shaking with fear right now. Then I remembered that the book was called *How Not to Be Afraid of Your Own Life*, and I knew what to do. Nothing.

I sat down to practice meditation in the area of my office designated for this. I lit a candle, took my seat, and offered a traditional opening chant, which contains a line that goes "Grant your blessing so that confusion may dawn as wisdom." I longed for this so much. I felt the power of the lineage, of all those who had chanted these lines before me, in these words and in my tears. I felt myself begin to relax. I remembered the instruction to stop fighting fear and instead begin to observe it, feel into it, take its pulse. I remembered that exploring fear with the agenda of feeling better would not work. I tried for a few minutes anyway, but then I just sat with my fear. I connected with its energy, and it felt sickening. I felt my throat begin to close and could hear my heartbeat through my chest. I watched as my mind filled up with dreadful, detailed

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thoughts about how inadequate I was. I stayed with the bad feelings. The fear was just below the surface of my skin, quivering, hot and cold at the same time. I noticed how I tried to struggle away from the fear. I tried to stop the escape attempt and simply rest with the fact that I was struggling. I saw my desperate hope that my meditation would release me from fear. I tried to drop that agenda. I saw hope well up with anticipation of release and sink down when release evaporated. And on it went, and on and on.

I sat with myself in this way for about an hour. Many times I thought, Okay, that's it, I feel better now, back to work. But I waited a little bit longer, and the fear uncoiled like a snake at the base of my spine and moved up and down, up and down, until the energy of fear seemed to fill the room. Although I still felt tremendously uncomfortable, I also noticed a kind of growing warmth. I was paying attention to myself. I was sitting with myself as I would hold a still sleeping child twisting from a nightmare. I wasn't angry with her, and there was no sense in trying to talk her out of it. All I could do was hold her gently until she was awake enough to know where she was. The Zen teacher and poet John Tarrant says, "Attention is the most basic form of love; through it we bless and are blessed," and that seemed really true. I rediscovered the part of myself that knew how to come back to balance, and I began to connect with her more and more. I remembered my unshakable faith in the Buddha-dharma, and with that, a sense of basic trust returned. I wish I could say

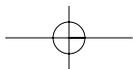
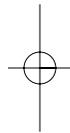
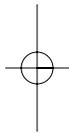
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that I leapt from the cushion fully centered and peacefully in control. I didn't. But I felt blessed anyway, and tremendously heartened. Fear had left me.

As I stated at the beginning, everything contained in this book is based on my own experience. The topics and exercises are those from which I've benefited most. In the end, there is nothing else to write about, nothing but what I can personally attest to.

If there's anything at all you might take away from this book, it's the notion of personal responsibility and the encouragement to view your own experience as the noble path. You can trust yourself and that life has meaning and is leading you somewhere. You can discover who you are beyond fear and, in so doing, discover the unique meaning of your own experience.

When we're afraid, we search for means to control the uncontrollable. When we find a system of thought that promises security, we want to believe in it wholeheartedly. It would be easy to subsume our own mind in a particular dogma and then call that faith. But lasting, genuine faith can arise only from experience. It can't be a gesture of the intellect or the emotions, only an organic arising. Turning your attention inward then is actually the best way to reach God, however you define that presence. What you find will not look like what others find. By fully owning your own mind and inhabiting your own body, you begin to know the truth. Meditation is the ground, path, and fruition of this activity.



APPENDIX:  
FREQUENTLY ASKED  
QUESTIONS

*Why should I meditate?*

Meditation introduces you to the way your mind really works so that it supports your intentions and aspirations instead of thwarting them. Meditation also gives your mental processes a rest, so that when you need them, they're strong and fresh.

*How often should I meditate?*

It's best to try to meditate a little bit every day. Frequency is much more important than duration. Ten minutes a day every day is preferable to an hour every Sunday. If you don't have ten minutes, try to take a few moments on the bus on the way to work or before falling asleep to tune in to your breath and let your mind relax. If you're stuck in traffic, it's not a good idea to meditate, but you can turn off the radio, shut off your cell phone, slow down, and let yourself enjoy the quiet.

*Appendix**What happens if I skip a day?*

It's okay. Don't make yourself feel so guilty that you never want to practice again. Just return to it the next day.

*Is meditation hard to learn?*

Meditation is not hard to learn. It takes about fifteen minutes to learn the technique. It's actually a return to your natural mind state, not the acquisition of a new one, so you already know how to meditate, you just may not know that you know.

*Do you have to sit on the floor?*

If you can sit comfortably on a cushion on the floor, great. If not, it's perfectly fine to sit in a chair. You will get the same benefits. Just be sure to follow the same posture instructions.

*What if I can't stop myself from thinking when I'm meditating?*

There's no problem. It's impossible to stop thinking; this is what the mind does. It's very important to realize that meditation is not about clearing the mind of all activity. It's about coming into a different, gentler, more playful relationship with your thoughts.

*I'm busy from morning till night. How can I possibly make time for this practice?*

Try several very short periods—five minutes or so—of meditation a day. You could do this at your desk,

*Appendix*

on the bus, or anyplace you can sit quietly. You can connect with the mind of meditation for a minute, or even for a few seconds. (Whenever you think of it, let your attention rest on your breath.)

*I have strong religious beliefs that have nothing to do with meditation. Will I have to give any of these up?*

No. Meditation is nontheistic. It doesn't require you to believe in any doctrine.

*Meditation can get so boring. Am I stuck? Doing something wrong?*

The meditation master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche has said boredom is actually a sign that things are going well—you are slowing down. Resistance to the form is dissolving. Your mind is settling.

*How do I know if I'm doing it right?*

If you're continuing to practice and are remembering to return your attention to the breath, everything is going fine.

*People report all kinds of amazing experiences and insights, but I never have anything like this. Am I doing something wrong or missing something?*

No. Everyone's experience of meditation is different. It is completely individual. In any case, the instruction for amazing experiences is the same as the instruction for thoughts: Gently let them go and return to the breath.

*Appendix*

*What am I trying to accomplish?*

Absolutely nothing. Meditating with a goal or in order to accomplish something is not giving the practice a fair shake. Instead, let yourself off the hook, step off the self-improvement treadmill, and simply be with yourself in your natural state. The practice isn't about achieving something. It's about letting go.

*What if my leg falls asleep or I have an itch? Can I move?*

Yes, but move mindfully. When you notice the urge to move, wait a moment. Notice what this urge feels like instead of responding to it automatically. Then rearrange to make yourself comfortable.

*I'm really loving this and want to share it with everyone in my family. Can I teach them how to meditate?*

It's preferable to direct them to a meditation center for instruction from an experienced teacher. See "Meditation Resources" for possibilities.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Pema Chödrön. *The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001.

Dalai Lama, and Howard C. Cutler. *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.

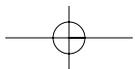
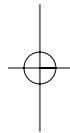
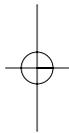
Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. *Ruling Your World: Ancient Strategies for Modern Life*. New York: Morgan Road Books, 2005.

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. *Turning the Mind into an Ally*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1970.

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1973.

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*. Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala Publications, 1984.



## MEDITATION RESOURCES

If you find that you'd like to make meditation an ongoing part of your life, please seek instruction from an authorized teacher. This is important. Even though the technique is very simple, the impact it may have is not. Without guidance, it is extremely easy to lose focus.

### *Shambhala Centers*

The meditation practice in this book is called *Shamatha* (peaceful abiding), as it is taught in the Shambhala Buddhist lineage, of which I am a part. It was brought to the West by the Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and is now directed by his son and spiritual heir, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.

*Meditation Resources*

To find a Shambhala center in your town, please visit [www.shambhala.org](http://www.shambhala.org).

*Retreat Centers*

*These centers offer in-depth programs:*

Dai Bosatsu Zendo  
Livingston Manor, N.Y.  
[www.daibosatsu.org](http://www.daibosatsu.org)

Esalen  
Big Sur, Calif.  
[www.esalen.org](http://www.esalen.org)

Green Gulch Farm  
Muir Beach, Calif.  
[www.sfzc.org/ggfindex](http://www.sfzc.org/ggfindex)

Insight Meditation Society  
Barre, Mass.  
[www.dharma.org/ims](http://www.dharma.org/ims)

Karmê Chöling  
Barnet, Vt.  
[www.karmecholing.org](http://www.karmecholing.org)

Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health  
Lenox, Mass.  
[www.kripalu.org](http://www.kripalu.org)

*Meditation Resources*

Omega Institute  
Rhinebeck, N.Y.  
[www.omega.org](http://www.omega.org)

Shambhala Mountain Center  
Red Feather Lakes, Colo.  
[www.shambhalamountain.org](http://www.shambhalamountain.org)

Spirit Rock Meditation Center  
Woodacre, Calif.  
[www.spiritrock.org](http://www.spiritrock.org)

Tassajara Zen Mountain Center  
Carmel Valley, Calif.  
[www.sfzc.org/tassajara](http://www.sfzc.org/tassajara)

*Meditation Supplies (Cushions, Bells, Candles)*

Samadhi Cushions and Samadhi Store  
1-800-331-7751  
[www.samadhicushions.com](http://www.samadhicushions.com)

Ziji  
1-800-565-8470  
[www.ziji.com](http://www.ziji.com)