

THE
WISDOM
OF A
BROKEN
HEART

SUSAN
PIVER



AUDIOBOOK:
ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

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“Dark Night of the Soul” read in Spanish by Ernesto Yáñez Castillo

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OVERVIEW

Thank you so much for listening to *The Wisdom of a Broken Heart*.

This PDF contains additional material that I was unable to include in the original or revised audiobook, including blog posts I wrote after the original work was published and transcripts of talks or interviews given on the topic of heartbreak. Over the years, I've learned so much from talking to people across the world on this most unique and utterly personal state of being called *heartbreak*.

In addition, you'll find all the "Try This" exercises from the audiobook as well as instructions for the three-day "From Brokenhearted to Wholehearted" program.

I hope with all my heart that this material will help you find a way to hear your own wisdom more clearly.

WELCOME

The despair of a broken heart from lost love is unexpectedly disorienting. It feels as if the world has flipped upside down because...it has. Whatever resources you may normally use to make sense of your inner experience—friends, therapies, distractions—simply has no impact on the overwhelm. It's scary. To make matters more difficult, books and techniques that purport to speed recovery are, to put it mildly, crap. Typical articles suggest the following: “Try yoga” or “Fall in love with your life” or “Stop overanalyzing.” Seriously? And there is actually a (non-scientific) poll that has determined the amount of time to get over a breakup: 3.5 months (or around 105 days). All of this serves to make anyone who is about to begin their 106th day trying to do yoga, fall in love with life, or cease analyzing feel even crazier.

Let's call these suggestions by their true name: *gaslighting*. Gaslighting is when something or someone tries to convince you that your experience is other than what you perceive it to be, that what is happening actually isn't, or that you feel something other than what you do.

It is gaslighting to suggest that heartbreak can be controlled or fixed, or that it has a predictable time frame. It is gaslighting to make you believe that you can heal your sorrow by changing the way you think about it. Theories of heartbreak

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as psychological problems that can be banished by psychological means are gaslighting.

Although it hurts beyond what can be described by anyone—except mystics and artists, who are masters at it—a broken heart is not a problem to be solved. It is a sacred experience of compassion, groundlessness, and the truth of what is really meant by being present.

If the spiritual path is about rousing profound compassion, now you know what compassion really feels like because you are choicelessly open to everything and everyone you encounter. All the walls around your heart are gone.

If all the great wisdom traditions posit that to understand the journey we need to let go of conventional notions about reality, now you know what this actually means because there is no longer any ground to stand on.

And if the most important teachings are about how to wake up and become present, now you are suddenly extremely, unbearably awake. Each moment invokes something unpredictable. You are constantly traveling and never arriving, which is another way of saying awake.

There is no way in hell that “fall in love with your life” or “stop overanalyzing” is going to help you with this.

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For myself, after months and months (and months) of tears and nightmares, of endless calls to friends and filling the recycle bin with empty boxes of tissues, I finally read something that was useful. It didn't particularly dispel my pain but it put an end, finally, to the gaslighting perpetrated by books, articles, and videos that told me in all sorts of ways to *get over it*.

What I read was this:

To be a spiritual warrior, one must have a broken heart;
without a broken heart and the sense of tenderness
and vulnerability, your warriorship is untrustworthy.

—CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA

In that moment, I wanted to be a spiritual warrior, meaning one who is brave and real. Learning that my previous efforts to become such a person might have failed because my heart was not yet broken was not reassuring exactly but *interesting*. So interesting that, eventually, I wrote a whole book about it.

In it, I've tried to share what it meant to me to navigate my own broken heart, not as a drill sergeant, babysitter, or scholar but as a spiritual practitioner. In fact, when I look back, I see that the experience of heartbreak was my first introduction to a true path. Before heartbreak, I could have read all the dharma in the world, but it would have remained academic vapor. After it, the teachings had life and potency.

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They were *real*. When I looked at my heartbreak as the beginning of a journey, I did not feel better, as mentioned, but eventually I noticed I was standing at the entry point to a richer and more elegant way of living the rest of my life, whether or not love ever reappeared. Now, more than 10 years post-publication, I am delighted to report to you that, yes, love did reappear, but, more importantly, I discovered the ability to live with more courage and clarity than might have been possible without the experience of heartbreak and the wisdom it introduced me to.

To follow are a chronological sampling of blog posts and transcripts of talks and interviews given on this astonishing topic.

ADDITIONAL WRITINGS

“Insights From a Friend”

BLOG POST, 2007

I was talking to my friend Michael Carroll today. We started discussing the nature of heartbreak. Here’s what he said. Check this riff:

The defining aspect of our nature is vulnerability. Vulnerability is the precondition for compassion. The foundation of vulnerability is uncertainty. The seed of the open mind is tenderness...this is what allows us to fall in love, cherish our children, and so on. But when we feel our tenderness, we panic at its very nature. The hypocrisy of pretending that we’re not vulnerable means we have to be checking our situation constantly to make sure it hasn’t fallen apart. This checking is the basis of anxiety. The truth is that we’re not okay. We’re wounded. It hurts. It takes bravery to be that open. Leaning into that not-okayness fully is the enlightened state. The ability to open to that which wounds us is the path. This is how non-duality is experienced.

—MICHAEL CARROLL

It’s good to have a friend who says things like this. I love you, Michael.

“Your Questions”

BLOG POST, 2008

Which kind of love is the kind I should seek? Where does my heart belong? How far should I go for love? And when I lose it, how is it possible to ever get over it?

These are good questions, but they are not possible to answer. They imply that the locus of control lies within you, that you can choose a certain person or vision of love and then go after it, or even that you can somehow dispose of the pain of heartbreak. But love just happens, and its outcome can't be controlled, no matter how passionately you love. And trying to choose between what you had once and what you have now is simply not possible. What you had is gone. It can't be gotten back. Even if that person came back on their knees, you still could not have what you once had. Trying to re-enter love is like trying to dip your foot in the same river twice. It is always rushing forward. Each time you step into it, it's different. Sometimes the current is rough and other times still. All you can do is feel what it feels like now and now and now. I'm not trying to say that this is all great or anything. It's just how it is.

The issue, then, is authenticity. How clearly and vividly and tenderly can you be yourself, feel what you feel? How truthfully can you express yourself, without hope or fear? How patiently and gently can you embrace yourself as you

ride the waves of passion, remorse, boredom, longing? This is fearlessness. When your heart is broken, you enter the territory of the spiritual warrior. The warrior's weapons are curiosity, openheartedness, and sadness.

So, much as we all might like to (myself included, certainly), we can't strategize about love. We can only welcome it when it appears, no matter what its form, and mourn its absence should it depart. And right now, you're both engaged in the only battle that matters: to keep your heart tender, soft, and alive, no matter what. Accepting your experience with kindness is the best way you can support yourself right now, and I truly hope you will both be kind towards yourself and those you encounter.

Interview with New Dimensions Radio

(EDITED FOR CLARITY) 2010

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *Hello, I'm Justine Willis Toms. Welcome to the New Dimensions Cafe today. I'm hosting Susan Piver, the author of The Wisdom of a Broken Heart: An Uncommon Guide to Healing, Insight, and Love.*

There are so many books and magazines out about how to get over a heartbreak, and you have a unique view. Rather than turning away from it and using all these techniques and exercises and going into therapy and all that, you talk about going into the sadness and grief. So tell us about that.

SUSAN PIVER: Yes. Most of the books and magazine articles out there are, like you say, about “9 Ways to Never Feel Sad Again” and “12 Steps to Never Having Your Heart Broken Ever Again.” All of these books and articles are about how to turn away from what is happening to you, how to dispense with it, get away from it, how to make it never happen again.

Actually, in my experience and observations, those attempts inflame the pain and make it worse. Instead, what I suggest is to turn towards the difficult feelings, not to wallow in them but to experience them, because they actually contain wisdom and unless you allow the feelings to arise, you never get that wisdom.

So it's important to simply feel what heartbreak feels like. That's the beginning. There's a difference between feeling pain and just being depressed. What is the difference between depression and sadness? Well, when Gloria Steinem was being interviewed about the death of her husband who died after they'd been married a short time, the interviewer said, "You must be very depressed," and she said—and I paraphrase—"I am not depressed; I'm sad. When you're depressed, nothing has any meaning, and when you're sad, everything does."

Anyone who has a broken heart can tell you that this is true. You feel everything when your heart is broken, not just your own sorrow but the sorrow of others...and also their joys. In Buddhism, this is considered the root of compassion, this ability to feel the feelings of others.

So it's a precious, precious state that doesn't feel good but is profound. Let's suppose that we are in a heartbreak and we might have friends who are well meaning and really want to help us get out of that. So we need to be a little more careful about the friends who are around us during such a period of time.

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *Please talk about that.*

SUSAN PIVER: Yeah. Well, one of the pluses of heartbreak is you see who your real friends are. You see who can stand with you in your difficulty and who can't. It can be extremely

helpful and healing to talk about what happened, but it's only good to do that with the right person. The right person is someone who will walk with you on your journey, who will listen to you talk, who will rejoice when you feel better, who will be sad when you stumble. The wrong person to talk to is the person who tells you how to stop feeling what you're feeling by suggesting that you have to go to this kind of therapy or heal this sort of wound or stop eating dairy or start doing yoga, whatever it is that people tell you to get away from how you feel. Those aren't the best people to talk to. The best ones are the ones who will accompany you as you figure it out yourself.

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *And what I get to is that we all think we know what's best for another person and we do genuinely want to help them figure it out. But let's say we're the friend of someone who's having a heartbreak. What's the best advice you can give to us as a friend of someone?*

SUSAN PIVER: The best advice is to allow that person to show up in your life exactly as they are.

I mean, there's a certain limit to it. If they're lying on their couch and it's nine years later, you might want to say, "Snap out of it, honey." But barring that, the best thing to do is if they want to call and tell you the story for the nine-thousandth time, listen to it. Don't just humor them when they feel sad. Hold them, ask them how they are. Think of them throughout the day, wonder how they're doing. Let them know that

when they start to rally, you rejoice for them, and if they hit hard spots, return without question to your empathy and compassion for them.

This is the best thing you can do. Accompany them, walk side by side rather than trying to distract them. Sometimes that's well meaning, but just as often it's because their discomfort makes you feel bad or you are afraid it might happen to you, and you want it to stop.

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *Exactly. And I'm thinking, too, I find in my own life when I have truly been listened to or met or been received by someone, when my story has been heard without judgment, without somebody trying to fix me, there is a great healing that takes place for me.*

SUSAN PIVER: I completely understand. There's something really healing about telling the story and having someone to talk to. When I was going through heartbreak, I had a friend who I would call crying maybe half a dozen times a day and wanting to tell her the story *again*. Ask, "Why did he do this? And how can I get over it?" And every time I did this, she was like, you want to tell me the story for the nine-thousandth time? Bring it, I'm here. She was the best friend and I will never forget her for that. When I have friends going through heartbreak, I try to emulate her behavior, which is to simply open without an agenda to what this person is feeling and saying and to simply be there. Doing that for someone else also teaches you how to do it for yourself.

You can learn to be with yourself without an agenda in the same way when you actually try to do it for others, and that's extremely beneficial.

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *Well, that is, and you talk about that lovingkindness to oneself and that gentleness is important in this whole process. In fact you even talk about it as a warrior's stance.*

SUSAN PIVER: Yes, the first thing to do when your heart is broken is to actually try to make friends with yourself, because it's so uncomfortable that our initial impulse, understandably, is to just try to make it go away however possible, which is an act of aggression. Instead you could be gentle and extend the hand of friendship to yourself by simply saying, "Okay, let's look at this. What am I feeling? What makes me feel better? What makes me feel worse?" That opening is not just an act of kindness; it is an act of warriorship, because to open to your own pain is the beginning of spiritual warriorship. And without that openness, that willingness, all you have in this life are strategies.

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *You quote Pema Chödrön, the Buddhist teacher, about how she says to feel it but let go of the story. Say something about that.*

SUSAN PIVER: Yeah, that's like the most perfect, simple, direct statement. What Pema Chödrön says to do with strong emotions is "feel the feeling and drop the story." That's the

alpha and omega of the process right there. The place to begin is with your body. What does that mean, exactly? The place to start is where the feelings are occurring, which is usually in your body. So if you start to hone in on “I feel heaviness in my chest” or “I feel like I weigh nine ounces and I could blow away” or “My breath is short” or “My stomach is tight,” that’s what I mean by feel the feelings. There’s no storyline particularly in your stomach or in your heart. Storyline is like “If I hadn’t said this, that wouldn’t have happened” or “I have this unhealed wound that I have to fix.” None of that story is happening in your body; that’s in your mind. So to feel the feelings and drop the story, all you have to do is tune into your own physical sensations.

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *You recommend a daily meditation practice that—while helpful in our life in general—is especially helpful when we’re experiencing heartbreak. How can we get into meditation when we’re feeling such turmoil?*

SUSAN PIVER: That’s a really good question. So the first step in dealing with heartbreak—and it sounds counterintuitive—is to relax.

What *relax* means in this sense is to simply allow your feelings to be what they are. Nobody knows how to do that exactly. We have to learn how, and the practice of meditation actually teaches you how to allow your feelings to be what they are without getting overwhelmed by them, without indulging them, and without running away from them.

Without a practice, I don't know how anyone could manage the situation. I think it's critical to develop a meditation practice.

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *Without pulling the pain towards you or pushing it away? Right?*

SUSAN PIVER: Exactly. When feelings arise, you want to push away the bad ones, and when you feel something good, you want to grasp it and hold on to it. However, nothing is going to actually last.

So instead of pulling your feelings towards you or pushing them away, it's useful instead to notice as they arise, abide, and dissolve. This is the most practical way to not just metabolize your pain but to experience your life as it is.

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *I just loved it where you talked about how to intensify the feeling and look at the clock and realize that, you know, you're just, like, really into that feeling, and then suddenly you'll notice at some point you'll be thinking about, I wonder what we're going to have for dinner tonight, and it's so true.*

SUSAN PIVER: It's like our mind just cannot hold any thought for very long. And when we actually look at the clock, we realize it may seem like forever, but it is not. I suggest that you time how long your feeling lasts because,

when your heart is broken, you think, *I'm always gonna feel this way. When is this going to end?*

So, okay, let's see how long it actually lasts. Are you going to feel this way forever? Let's investigate. So when the pain starts to get intense, look at the clock on your computer or your phone or whatever. Think, *Okay, I'm going to time this and I'm going to focus on this feeling, and instead of trying to push it away, I'm actually going to try to inflame it.*

Bring it on. Intensify the feeling. How long is it going to last? Watch the seconds tick by, and note how much time has passed before you think, *I wonder what's for lunch?* or *Is it time to go home yet?*

If you time yourself, I'll bet it's not even close to a minute.

JUSTINE WILLIS TOMS: *In the book, you have a program to experience a new way of working with heartbreak. So say something about that.*

SUSAN PIVER: It was really important to me to include a program in the book where you could actually do the things that are suggested, because we've all had books that are like "That's so helpful," and you put it on the shelf and it's gone.

This program teaches you to bring meditation practice into your life on a daily basis. It's pretty simple. It's not a truly demanding program, but it teaches you very practically how

to make time for it, how to learn it. It also includes loving-kindness practice, when to do it, how to do it.

Finally, it suggests ways of working with your heartbreak through journaling and contemplations. By the end of the program, I really believe that you will feel better—not like “Oh joy, all my problems are solved” but better. But you will feel like you’ve reestablished some dominion over this very out-of-control situation and you are actually managing it.

“On Heartbreak and the Buddhist Path”

TALK AT THE VICTORIA SHAMBHALA

MEDITATION CENTRE, 2010

Thank you for coming out tonight and for being willing to contemplate this subject. I already know that you are courageous because this is a tough subject.

What happens if someone tries to apply the Buddhist view to the topic of heartbreak? What we will find is that talking about heartbreak and talking about love turn out to be the same thing.

First, I ask you to come up with one word that, for you, is a euphemism for heartbreak. Okay, let's get five people to volunteer their word. Grief. Pain. Sorrow. Loss. Separateness. Yes, all good words. During this talk, hold your word as a contemplation, and all that means is you take your word and you stick it in your mind and then forget about it. See if it sort of bounces back to you at any point. And the one thing I want to say about your word (before we go into my words) is that something about your word is your friend.

My interest in this topic started with my own broken heart, certainly. The heartbreak of lost love is somehow different from other kinds of heartbreak. It includes things like shame, an unbelievable sense of worthlessness, and a feeling

that if this one person doesn't want you, you are unwanted by, basically, all of humanity.

No matter how many times you try to prop yourself up, something comes along and knocks that down. Every single thing that happens, every conversation, every advertisement, every email is either confirmation of your worthlessness or some small indication that maybe you're not completely worthless. The world shrinks into an experience of shame and out-of-control mood swings. On a particular day, you may be walking around thinking, *I'm okay, I've probably moved on. This isn't so bad.* And then you see a kitten or something and you completely fall apart because he or she got a kitten right before you broke up and that kitten reminds you of all kittens you will never have together. This kind of grief is also accompanied by obsessive thinking: *if I hadn't worn pink, if I didn't drink coffee or take Saturdays off of work or make that toast—whatever it might be—this relationship would still be happening.*

Such thoughts come to you while you're awake, and they come to you while you're asleep. When my heart was broken, the person I was no longer in a relationship with (I had broken up with him) started going out with someone else, and my world collapsed. I still can't really explain why this particular breakup destroyed me, but it did. I mean, everybody has relationships that end and then, to one degree or another, you feel sad, you know, even desperately sad for some weeks or months, but then you move on.

But there are some kinds of heartbreak that you don't move on from. They stop you. They shatter you. This was that kind of heartbreak. I don't have to explain what that means, I'm sure, because when you've experienced it, you know what it is.

One day I was crying a lot and taking out the trash, and I was obsessing and I was crushed. I was crushed. I thought I would never get over it. So I was dragging the trash down to the curb, crying, and thinking, *Why, why, why did this happen to me? I bet he's with her right now. And they're probably laughing at me. I don't think I can handle this,* and on and on and on and on. I got down to the curb with the trash and sat down on the curb with the garbage. I thought to myself, *Maybe when the trash people come, they could throw me away, too. Because I don't think I can handle it. Maybe they could compact me into some little piece of something that could then just, poof, go away.* And then at that moment—this is the truth—I heard a voice (presumably inside my own head) that said, “But nothing is happening right now.”

That was startling to me. It stopped my mind.

I looked around and it was so. Nothing was happening. No one was destroying my future. No one was laughing at me. No one was telling me they wished I'd done this instead of that. Nobody was saying anything because no one was there.

And in that moment I had this sense of incredible liberation and peace and the recognition that underneath everything—my heartbreak, the garbage, the sunlight—is this stillness. Complete stillness that is also alive. It is warm and it is always there.

This quality of release lasted for maybe 12 seconds, and then it all came back like running into a brick wall again. But I never forgot that moment when I realized that it was not my circumstances that were causing me such sorrow, it was my mind. If I could somehow learn to work with my mind, then I could heal my heart. This turned out to be the truth.

When I began to study Buddhism, I learned more about this silence and what heartbreak had to do with spiritual practice. In our lineage, there are extraordinary teachings on heartbreak and its connection to spiritual warriorship, meaning how to be an authentic human being who exists for the benefit of others. To give everything: that's a spiritual warrior.

To be that kind of person, according to these teachings, you must have a broken heart. If you don't have a broken heart, your warriorship is not trustworthy. That was the first time that I thought about my own heartbreak, *This actually could be good.*

Buddhist teachings are about how to turn towards heartbreak as opposed to all the teachings in the conventional

world, which are about how to turn away from it. I discovered there are two schools of breakup advice out there. The first one I like to call *you go girl*. That's the kind of advice that says you were probably just too awesome for that person and you should move on. Get a new haircut, have a few cocktails, and move on.

I don't think that is particularly helpful, but I don't think it's bad advice. The second kind, however, is bad. This advice says there's something wrong with you and you brought this on yourself. You made this heartbreak happen by carrying forward into your adult life an unhealed wound and/or by thinking the wrong thoughts. If you could only heal that wound and think the right thoughts, you would never have to feel pain again. This troubles me very much. This is bad advice. It assumes that sorrow is not supposed to be a part of your life. It also assumes that you know what's best for you, which may sound weird, but who hasn't had the experience of thinking something is going to be good and it turns out to be awful and vice versa. The world is so much bigger than our thoughts about it, and the depths don't reveal themselves by trying to think positive thoughts and hoovering out all the bad thoughts. There's so much more to being a human being than that. So I don't like that advice.

In the Buddhist tradition, the advice is to open to it. Turn towards it." Okay, but how do you do that? Here are some thoughts, based in the three-yana view and how the spiritual path progresses.

The Buddha turned the wheel of dharma three times, gave three big sets of teachings, also called the three yanās or vehicles.

The first yana is called the Hinayana, which means the foundational vehicle. It contains the teachings that you would expect someone to give if they just discovered the path to enlightenment. You have to begin with yourself, your personal situation, how you conduct your life. First, get your own life in order because that's where every path has to start.

Once you stabilize your world, your heart naturally flows open to other people. You open to people in a different way than when you don't feel stable. Here, the second set of teachings, the Mahayana (or greater vehicle), come into play. These teachings are about love in both its forms: relative (compassion) and absolute (recognition of the truth of emptiness).

The third yana, the Vajrayana (or adamantine vehicle), contains the teachings that are relevant once your basic personal life is pretty okay and you know how to open to other people. Now your whole life is a path, and everything that arises becomes a part of that path.

When it comes to heartbreak, it is very useful to apply the three-yana view to your own healing process.

Beginning with the foundational vehicle, stabilize your inner life. This doesn't mean to stop feeling pain. It means first pare down all nonessential activities so you can really pay attention to what you are experiencing because it is big. It deserves your attention. The advice about being busy and distracting yourself from pain—you want to forget about that for a while because we want to focus on pain.

In this regard, it is helpful to simplify, as mentioned, to only essential activities and essential people. Essential people in this case are the ones who can befriend you while you're in pain. They may be the people you thought were your friends or they may be other, unexpected people. The essential people are not the ones who tell you how to get over it, like "You should learn to meditate" or "You should get a different job" or "You should stop eating dairy" or whatever it is that people say that they think will help you. Those aren't your friends right now. Your friends are the people who will be with you as you learn to tame your mind, which doesn't mean empty it or stop bad thoughts. Rather, it means learning how to relax with this extraordinary rushing, overwhelming flow of thoughts. The more you try to fight it, the stronger it becomes, so the only choice here is to relax. *Relax* in this case means *allow* because there's nothing more relaxing than allowing, right? I don't know how one would do that without the practice of meditation, by the way.

The second phase, the Mahayana view, says, "Look at your heart." This is where the teachings on warriorship begin to

come into a little sharper focus. Because what you have here is a heart that can feel everything.

Your heart may be broken, but it is also broken open. You can feel everything; your own feelings certainly, but you also feel the sorrows and joys of others whether you know them or not. It's automatic. You don't think, *I imagine that would make you happy and therefore I'm happy for you*. That intermediate step is gone, and you feel it directly as if it was your own feeling. And you are keenly attuned to the presence or absence of love in every moment, and you know beyond doubt that the only thing that matters is love.

When you are a person who feels everybody's everything, is attuned to the presence or absence of love, and knows beyond doubt that it is the only thing that matters...what have we here? I think that's called a *bodhisattva*, an awakened being. This is beautiful. There is incredible beauty, then, in this heartbreak because your heart, in a sense, has never been more alive and, okay, it also still feels like crap but now we're getting very, very real. This is what it feels like when all the capacity you have to love is now liberated from its object.

It has no object to attach to because that person is gone. Boom. It ricochets and zooms and crashes and seeps and runs and jumps and whatever else it might do. You feel how big your own heart is, unattached to an object.

The trick at this stage is to learn, not how to close your heart but how to stabilize it in the open state.

You can do that. The practice of lovingkindness meditation teaches you how. In *The Wisdom of a Broken Heart* I give instruction in the practice, and there are many wonderful books about lovingkindness meditation. It is very useful to learn the traditional practice.

You can also practice it in your own way by thinking of someone or something you love and just wishing them well. You can do it by being nice to everyone you encounter in some way, which doesn't mean being a wuss. It means sort of being attuned to what another person might be experiencing and trying to offer something that could be useful to them.

Sometimes what is useful is to give a hug. Sometimes it's useful to ignore. Sometimes it's useful to be silent or yell. So at this point you start to make a very important transition in your work with heartbreak. Shift your gaze ever so slightly away from your own need for love onto your need to give love, which is equally as potent and real. You take the seat of power in this way, when you try to give love in whatever way you can in every moment. This is the healing gesture.

We live in a world where, for whatever reason, our idea is to first get love and then we will give it. But you can reverse

that. You can totally reverse that. You can give it and then you'll get it. It's pretty simple.

You could begin by turning your attention to what you feel, just to notice it, to make room for it, to feel it. You could even take heartbreak as the object of your meditation. As you take breath as the object of meditation in *shamatha* practice, here you could take your feelings as the object of your meditation by bringing your attention to them, not to try to squish them but just to know them. And then see what happens. In this way you befriend yourself, like you would for someone you knew who was suffering. What do you need from me, what can I do? But how often do you ever do that for yourself? So you could do that.

The next question is about obsessiveness. How do you stop doing that? It can seem impossible to do, so at this point obsessiveness is part of your practice. In meditation, you rest your mind on your breath...maybe for only one half of one millionth of a second. Then you start thinking about something else...and then you come back and it may also only last for an incredibly short time. Repeat, repeat. I know it sounds awful and it is quite labor intensive, but it helps. Actually, I should say, "Try it and see if it heals," because I'm making all of this up, so you should take it with a giant grain of salt.

Pema Chödrön gave the pith instruction for the question of obsessiveness, and I'm really mad at her because this is my

whole book in one sentence: “Feel the feeling and drop the story.” Okay, good night! [Laughter.]

“Feel the feeling and drop the story” is quite expeditious. It aids the metabolization process of this pain. It’s also a kind thing to do for yourself.

To recap, in the first phase you begin to pacify your life through spiritual practice and simplifying whatever you can. Second, there are practices that help stabilize your heart in the open state, including all of the emotional intensity and exhaustion you experience. At this point, the third phase begins. You notice that there’s some kind of profound wisdom in your life, in yourself, and in this experience—not in the conventional sense but somewhere beyond that. You notice that your life is a path, it’s going somewhere, something is developing. The third phase is when you take your entire life as your path, including everything that is broken and everything that is unbroken. It turns out that when your heart is broken there is an incredible opportunity to know yourself and to cultivate a deeper ability to love. You learn that, fortunately or unfortunately, there is simply no way to make love safe. And when most people say they want love, what they really mean is they want to be safe. They want some sort of shelter against loneliness, against old age, against financial problems, against whatever. Those are good things. We should all have them—but I would not call that love. Love can’t be tamed, you can’t game it, it’s bigger than you.

All you can do is rejoice when it's there and grieve when it's not...and, somehow, remain open. One of my big learnings in creating this work was that you cannot make love safe and, in fact, there is no relationship that will not end in heartbreak. Someone's gonna break up with someone, fall in love with someone else, or—and this is the best case scenario—someone's going to die. Thanks a lot, reality!

As practitioners, here's the question we have to ask ourselves: Since it turns out that the four noble truths are actually true...now what?

The more you love, the more painful these truths are. The reality of the eventual parting becomes stronger and stronger as love deepens. My personal belief is that this is why most relationships fail—this reckoning is just too much to ask. This is armchair analysis from someone who hangs out in her room thinking about things, so don't take it too seriously.

But if it's inevitable that your heart's going to break and you choose to love anyway, the path of warriorship is in full swing.

When we study Buddhism, we learn about threefold logic. Everything has threefold logic, whatever it is you're doing: taking a new job or reading the newspaper or taking a drink of water. Take eating food as an example. The ground is you're

hungry, the path is you cook something, and the fruition is satiety.

What is the ground path and fruition of heartbreak? I'm going to tell you what I think it is. But it's a very interesting question to pose to yourself, and I encourage you to do so. What I have discovered is that the ground of heartbreak is pain. That's where you start. That's where you stand. That's where you begin.

The path is awareness. Can you turn your attention to yourself, your feelings? Can you open to it? How much can you understand about love? How much can you feel your longing for love? Awareness is the path.

The fruition is love. You learn the truth about love in this very powerful way.

So I think that's my talk. Any questions?

Can you say again why it is that most relations fail?

Because it's too hard to confront the moment of parting. Then, you have to understand how to hold pain and love together in the same moment. I believe that's the definition of compassion. What also comes to mind is how alchemists sought to turn base metals into gold. The first step is to make it volatile, to sort of shake it up or make ice into steam or whatever, because when it's volatile you can reshape it.

In heartbreak, you are in a state of sacred volatility, and, you know, you might as well use it. You could turn conventional love into transcendent love.

What about when I meditate on my pain and then there's just more and more sadness and grief, and the well seems so, so deep and the years roll by?

Yes. The point is you turn your attention to your sadness and it seems that it has no end and indeed it doesn't right now. It could go on for years. Yeah. But there's a difference between depression and sadness. I wish I could say to you that there's a faucet that you turn on and all the sadness pours out until there is no more left. But I don't know of any such thing. I hope you will be patient.

So, my question is did I miss something—how important is it to love yourself? How do you get from being heartbroken through loving yourself?

I understand that many counselors and psychologists say that the path to love begins with loving yourself. But I find that the most expeditious way to love myself is to flip the formula. When I try to love someone else, then I start to love myself. That's been my experience. For me it has always been I love someone else and then I love me.

“How to Gain Closure”**BLOG POST, 2010**

Among the many difficulties that come with a breakup, the worst may be when the person who broke up with you will not discuss it and may even cut off contact altogether. I have one friend who was talking about marriage one day, and the next actually could not get her to take his calls. Eventually, he got a letter saying it was over and she refused to talk to him ever again. What the? Or one person thinks everything is fine and her partner comes home, says it's over, she's moving out, and does not want to talk about it. I get emails from people who have been broken up with by email, text, and Post-it. This is not an urban legend. It really happens.

When the breakup is communicated in one of these ways, you can be sure the person breaking up is not interested in much more conversation. No one knows why.

When someone leaves you like this, you are simply—and understandably—in shock. It just feels impossibly stressful and anxiety producing. You think you are now stuck with a gaping wound that will never close because the only way to close it is to hash it out *in relationship*. And that's not an option.

You'll have to figure out a way to create closure on your own.

I can suggest a particular journaling exercise that may help. It sounds deceptively simple, but for many it has been a healing experience. See if it works for you.

The exercise is to tell the story of your relationship in three parts. The first part covers the period from when you met until your relationship took its form. The second part is about the duration of the relationship, up until the time it started to fray. The third part starts when you began to break up and ends in the present moment.

I'll suggest a sentence to begin with and a sentence to end with for each part. Whatever you write in between those two sentences is up to you.

You will be writing this story in the third person. So instead of writing "I met him on a Monday," you'd write "She met him on a Monday." Instead of saying "I first noticed her at the gym," you'd write "They first noticed each other at the gym" or "Alex first noticed Emma at the gym." You get the idea. You view yourself and everyone else in your story as characters and, as with characters, you can describe them in any way you like, attribute to them the qualities you think are relevant, and put dialogue in their mouths as befits your story.

You can write it any way that you like—as a short story, poem, or, if you're feeling wildly creative, a screenplay. If you hate to write, bullet point it.

I suggest doing this exercise in three different periods lasting 90 minutes to 2 hours each. Whether over the weekend or on three successive nights, let there be time in between writing sessions, at least a few hours. Take your time and allow it to unfold. You never have to share this work with anyone, so look deep and be honest. Start at the appointed time and—very important—stop at the appointed time. Contain your writing periods cleanly.

Before beginning each writing session, sit quietly for a few moments. Maybe light a candle, place some fresh flowers on your writing table, pour yourself a glass of wine, or make yourself a delicious cup of tea. Make it special. After you've settled your mind down a bit, make the aspiration that this writing session help create healing for all involved, especially yourself. At the end, sit quietly for a few moments and, again, offer your words up to be used for healing, somehow, in some way, starting now.

The first sentence of the first writing period is:

They met like this: _____ .

The last sentence is:

That's when they knew they were in a relationship.

As mentioned, feel free to tweak those sentences to suit your story. It's rare that a story is that black and white, but do your

best to cover the period between the time you first encountered this person and the time your relationship took a particular form, whether it lasted one night or thirty-two years.

The first sentence of the second writing period is:

They knew they were in love (or hooked or connected) when _____ .

The last sentence is:

That's when they knew something was going wrong.

Again, just fill in between these two sentences as best you can.

The first sentence of the third writing period is:

It dawned on them that this was *really* ending when _____ .

End with this sentence:

That's when they knew that the relationship in its current form was over.

When you are done writing, walk away from the exercise. Do something else—read, sob, walk, cook, sleep. Let it lie there for a while. Then, if you're moved to, journal about what

you saw, learned, felt as you did this exercise, if anything. In my programs, I suggest finishing by doing lovingkindness practice for yourself and the one who broke your heart. (You can find this practice in the audiobook in chapter 30, “The Practice of Lovingkindness.”)

“Opening to Love after Heartbreak”**BLOG POST, 2010**

Since *The Wisdom of a Broken Heart* came out, I've had the honor of speaking with many people who are meeting this incredibly difficult life passage with courage and tenderness. We talk about the endless waves of grief, fear, and rage and how one could possibly weather them. We talk about the valuable, hard-won heart opening that can arise. And, invariably, we touch on the possibility of loving again. Many believe they will never be able to do so and, if the possibility arose, would never, ever be able to trust it. When you know love can be lost at any time, how on earth could you try it again?! I've heard this question time and again. I know that it is possible to open to love again, even if your heart has been broken under the most egregious circumstances (which usually involve some kind of betrayal). It happens every day. It happened to me. I've studied Buddhist teachings on compassion and wisdom and have every confidence they can teach you how.

For years, I have been trying to figure out some kind of advice for how to leave your broken heart behind in order to enter a new relationship with confidence.

For better or worse, those two things—a broken heart and having confidence in love—are actually interdependent.

When most of us say we're looking for love, we really mean we're looking for safety. When your heart has been broken, you realize that love can never be made safe and, in fact, efforts to make it so are related more to self-protection than opening yourself to the unpredictable, impossible-to-mandate waves of passion, confusion, joy, and disappointment that accompany love. To love, you have to be receptive, vulnerable. In fact, it is through vulnerability alone that we come by true love. So, in one sense, when your heart is broken you are ahead of the game. It makes you permanently vulnerable and thus is actually teaching you how to love. You learn how deep your longing for love is and how much you have to give. You realize that love is by far the most important thing in your life. Your heart is not just broken; it is broken open and so you feel everything—your own joys and sorrows but also another's, unquestioningly. These attributes make you uniquely, outrageously suited to love—if you can learn to stabilize your heart in this state of openness.

Plus, there is one thing that makes it absolutely certain that you will be able to open to love again. That thing is love itself. When it comes to you, from you, through you, it is unmistakable. It chooses you, you don't choose it, and, like it or not, you open unquestioningly. Of course, there is no telling how it will all turn out (there never, ever is). But when love is present, it quells outer, inner, and secret obstacles, and you are reminded that your heart is absolutely indestructible. Over and over, it can refill with love on the spot. It never forgets how to do this. Love is the rising tide that

lifts all boats—those of despair and those of shame, of rage, of terror, and of longing—to cast them once again upon the waves, heading who knows where, you and your beloved along for the ride. This is how it works. I have no idea why.

Explore the nature of your wounds. Develop methods of extreme self-care. Extend the hand of kindness to yourself as you work through these overwhelming emotions. Please do this for yourself. And as you do, don't worry about how you're ever going to open to love again. Love itself will do the work for you.

In the meantime, here's what you can do to help: relax. Relaxing here means stepping off the self-improvement treadmill and allowing your feelings to be just as they are without attaching a narrative to them. Make room for them, and what you now consider as obstacles will reveal themselves simply as facets of wisdom. The practice of meditation is exactly this act.

I created a special version of mindfulness-awareness meditation (the practice suggested in my book), for those times when you feel that your heartbreak will never end and you are intolerably fragile.

When in doubt, sorrow, or despair: do less. Over and over, accept yourself on the spot. From this gesture of gentleness, great space opens and your deepest wisdom arises to guide you. This is guaranteed.

“*Love, Attachment, and Heartbreak*”

THE INTERDEPENDENCE PROJECT PODCAST, 2011

SUSAN PIVER: I just want to start by asking you to ask yourself a couple things. What is the point of love? Not telling you there’s a right answer, obviously. Is it just an evolutionary trick to get us to protect our sexual organs so we can procreate? Maybe? Does it have some spiritual implication? Is it just...because? Ask yourself, what is the point?

When you say you want love—presuming that you do say that because not everybody does, although most people do—what do you mean? Think about that. Many people mean, at least for some portion of their lives, that they want to be loved. That’s cool. That’s natural. Is that what you mean?

When I was a child—this is going to sound like a very sad story, but it’s not—I knew that some family members did not love me. I knew it. I knew that they had mistaken me for some object in their mind. They only saw what they thought I should be. That was very painful.

I’m sure that you have all had this experience. You can tell, in some way, in your body, or in your heart: this person is looking at me, and they’re saying things to me, and they’re declaring things, but it’s not true. It’s not about me.

Somehow I'm a projection in their world, and I'm not an actual person.

Fast forward some years, and I had a boyfriend and we were, for various reasons, breaking up. I wanted to break up and he really did not. Then, one day he said, "I think we should break up," and I was like "But...you...why?" He said, "Because I love you more than I love us." That was the opposite of what I had grown up with.

Holding these two stories in your mind, and I'm sure you have your own equivalents, I'll say some things about this topic, and then we can have a conversation. Please be patient with me because it's so hard to talk about this. Not because it's all personal and it feels bad. I don't care about that. But because it's just hard to get your arms around this.

There's several misconceptions about love that I want to start by mentioning. The first one is that love is supposed to make you happy. We all think that, right? That's the only misconception, actually. I was lying about there being two. That's it. [Laughter.]

To sweeten the pot—and because I'm a Buddhist and we like to give you the bad news up front—there is no relationship that is not going to end in heartbreak. Can you understand why I say that? It's going to end. It's going to end because you're going to stop loving each other, or someone's going to love someone else, or someone decides they don't want to

be there, or someone's going to die. There's no relationship that's not going to end in heartbreak, in which case you can relax, just take it easy.

If it's not supposed to make you happy, and it's going to end in heartbreak...what the hell is going on? Why do you want to do it? Because you do. That's all I've got on that.

It's very painful to be a projection of someone else's mind, which is what you can feel yourself becoming at a certain point in most relationships, I think it's pretty fair to say. You fall in love, and this is an amazing thing. This is real. I'm not saying "Oh, that's some trick." No. It's so real. It flips you from being an ordinary person, into being this profound spiritual being...a spiritual, sexual, loving being who can see how incredibly tender you are. The world turns into something magical. This is true.

If things go a certain way, you might get into a relationship with this person and at some point, in the course of work-a-day life, this incredible openness and tenderness and magic...changes. The ease with which you share your heart and feel kindness and compassion for this other person gradually starts to change. At some point, in most relationships, it becomes more of a negotiation of how you're supposed to make me happy. The ability to apply the precepts of the dharma, which is what we're here to talk about, which was so natural at first, becomes incredibly difficult. The hardest person to be compassionate towards, to

feel love and kindness towards, to have equanimity about, is the person that you actually love. Don't you think that's weird?

AUDIENCE: *Yes.*

SUSAN PIVER: Yes! Why? Why does it become the hardest to apply the dharma to this relationship, the closest relationship that you have? It's sort of a rhetorical question. Although if anyone knows, I'd love to hear it. It doesn't matter how much dharma you know. It doesn't matter how deep your practice is. When it comes to this, and that person does that thing for the 107th time that you've told them never to do again, all of your ability to be equanimous and compassionate disappears.

How can Buddhism help? I think it can help in two ways or many ways. One way is it can help you hold the view of what love is and can be, and how to do it. If you start out with the wrong view, like "You're supposed to make me happy and that's what the relationship is about," then, obviously, it's not going to work. What is the right view? Does anybody have any thoughts? It's a hard question. What is the right view?

AUDIENCE: *Maybe that we're here to share ourselves.*

SUSAN PIVER: We're here to share ourselves; I think that is an excellent view.

AUDIENCE: *To clearly see the person that's craving security without clinging.*

SUSAN PIVER: Without clinging, yes. That's a good one. It's very hard not to cling to the person you love. It's really hard, and I'm not saying that you shouldn't cling to them.

AUDIENCE: *It's also hard to not cling to an image we make of that person.*

SUSAN PIVER: Yes, that's right. I think that's the crux. It's hard not to cling to an image of that person that we make. This person that you fall in love with gradually starts to disappear in your mind and is replaced with this image of what a person who loves me is supposed to look like. The projector goes crazy. The closer you get to love—because the higher the stakes are, and the more scared we all get—the more we become like “If you're going to love me, this is how you have to do it” and “This is what I need in a relationship. You should know those things, and those things are not to be pooh-poohed.” When that becomes what the relationship is about, then it chokes. It chokes.

We all have a movie playing in our head, around the clock, of what life is supposed to look like. We cling to it because we're afraid to let go of it. If you just open your mind into space, without knowing what things are supposed to look like, it's very groundless and disorientating. You need to practice a lot to be able to do that.

In the meantime, you have a movie playing in your head that you're constantly refining: getting a new director, firing the star, and just changing the situation. In your forehead—this is how I envision it—there's a lens, and wherever you look this thing is projecting the movie that's in your head. Whoever happens to walk through is in the movie. I think the right view of love—this is my personal opinion, the Buddha did not say this—is to turn that projector off, completely. Do you think that's a good idea?

AUDIENCE: *It is the best way to live life, and it's the way to love.*

SUSAN PIVER: How do you turn off the projector? Wouldn't that be amazing? How would you like to be loved by someone who would turn off the projector? Think about that.

AUDIENCE: *That'd be kind of scary.*

SUSAN PIVER: How so?

AUDIENCE: *I imagine that it would reflect your projector a lot, what you're adding to a situation if nobody else is adding something.*

SUSAN PIVER: It would shine a spotlight on your own projections. Yeah, it would, I'm sure, which is very polite.

AUDIENCE: *Sometimes it's hard to see it this way.*

SUSAN PIVER: Yes, it is difficult, very difficult. You can't just go "Okay, that's right. I'm going to turn that projector off, and I'm going to stop seeing you through the lens of what I think is going to make me happy. Instead, I'm just going to see you." You know what it's like to be with someone that can do that. I'm sure that you've all had the experience even if it's just for a moment of being with someone that just looks at you. I don't think love is any more than that. In that sense, we are eminently capable of it.

Tibetan meditation master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche defined something called *spiritual materialism*. He wrote a very seminal and important book called *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* because of how he saw us in the West. This was in the hippie days, and people were doing spiritual practices from the East to gain something, like to feel happy or to solve problems or to—whatever the reasons that we all start doing spiritual practice for.

He said that is not a good idea. I was thinking about it this afternoon. When you do a spiritual practice to gain something, it's materialistic, and it won't work. Could we look at spiritual materialism through the lens of relationships and redefine it as romantic materialism? What is romantic materialism?

There are Three Lords of Materialism. Chögyam Trungpa did not make this up; these are Buddhist teachings. The Three Lords of Materialism are: physical, which means you think

If I just get the certain possessions, I'm going to be happy—this car or this jacket or this company or whatever it is. The second Lord is psychological. If we can all hold the right view, all have the right philosophy, then we're going to be happy. The third Lord of Materialism is spiritual, which is doing spiritual practice to make your life into something where you don't have to feel suffering.

These apply very easily to relationships. The first Lord of Romantic Materialism is in charge when we think *I'm going to have a relationship and then I'm going to have a house and I'm going to have some stuff and I'm going to have a garden.* All lovely, good things. I hope you have them if you want them.

“That's going to make me happy, and my partner is going to need to help me get those things. That's what a relationship is: having these things together.” In part, that's true, but if you're thinking *Then I'll be happy,* that's going to be incorrect.

The second Lord is psychological. Now it starts to get very insidious, which is thinking *In order to love me, you have to view love in this particular way. You have to act in a certain way and hold the same definition of love as I do.* It can be very tricky to be in a relationship with someone who wants you to look at love according to their definition.

For example, I always thought I wanted to be in a relationship with someone who took me very seriously. When I was growing up, no one really took me seriously. No one listened

to what I said. *When I'm in a relationship, then, I thought, I want it to be with someone who takes me very seriously.* As it turned out, that is not what I got. By some mysterious means, I got into a relationship with someone who laughs, not at me but is, kind of, when I start talking about my trips and my “This is not working for me because of”—he finds that very humorous, and then it makes me laugh. Anyway, if I had held him to this particular rule, I would have missed something quite sweet.

The third Lord says that if you find the right person to love you, then your suffering in life will end in whole or in part... and that's not true. Now I'm being a little uncheerful here. Instead, however, it's not going to make you happy. It's not going to solve your problems and it's not going to dispel suffering from your life. But when you find a person to love who also wants to love you and you stand toe to toe through this life as best you can for as long as you can, everything changes.

I think the idea of love is to teach you to love. That sounds so trite, but to teach you to give your heart away over and over and over and over again, and to step continually outside of your comfort zone to meet the person and cut through the relationship issues and expectations to embrace this being over and over and over again, and to relate with this tide of expectation and need and grasping, and the tide of aggression that you feel towards someone who you need their love and they piss you off, and the tide of ignorance of not

understanding who they are and not understanding yourself. To watch this tide of emotion and poison and delight and surprise and mystery and difficulty and confusion together, to watch it together is an extraordinary thing to find. (Barring any kind of emotional or physical abuse or addiction issues, or anything that operates outside of reason.)

When I was wanting to get married, I lived here (in New York City), and my husband lived in Boston. I never wanted to live in Boston in my whole, entire life. I live there now, and I still don't want to. I'm available to move back. [Laughter.] I lived here for seven years, and he lived there. This is the kind of thing where you could say "There's no way this can work. I don't want to live there. He doesn't want to live here. We should break up."

For seven years, we could not answer this question "Where are we going to live?" which is an important question. It sounds biblical. It was amazing to hold this intense disagreement with someone for this long period of time with no comprehension of how it could ever get resolved. I'm never going to want to live in Boston, and he is never going to not have his son, who at the time was six. So there was no way that I would say "You have to live here."

What we did for seven years was disagree, realize there's no solution, get really freaked out, spend tons of money that we didn't have living in two places, and get upset with each other for not being able to do something differently. What

we never did, which would have screwed everything up, was to issue any ultimatum. “You have to change. You have to do it my way. You have to see it differently.” Once that happens, the whole game is over.

This is an example of what I mean by just standing and watching the tide of difficulty together without knowing how to resolve it, feeling fully how much it sucks, and how upset you are with the other person. “I don’t like you. Isn’t that horrible for me and for you right now?” “Yes, it is.” “I think that you are insane, and that makes me feel so bad about us. Isn’t that terrible for you?” “Yes.” That’s what I mean by going through these things together.

Anyway, the antidotes to the Three Lords of Romantic Materialism, if I can take license with Chögyam Trungpa’s work, are first rouse your own confidence. I think so many of the difficulties in love come from losing your own confidence and becoming afraid of not being loved, of being an old person with no family but a lot of cats and dirty laundry (that’s what I envision). You become very afraid that your life is completely not going to work out unless you find love or unless, even more dangerous, this one person loves you. It could be awful to have that one person not love you, but still, if you interact with people with a general sense of confidence, then this is a good antidote to the grasping for love.

How do you rouse confidence? It’s different than saying “Everything’s fine.” This is a question you should ask

yourself. “How do I rouse my confidence?” I can tell you what I was taught about how to rouse confidence. There are five points. They’re very funny and they work. (There’s nothing about believing in yourself or anything like that.)

The first one is to clean up your room. I’m not kidding. The first one is to clean up your house. Neaten your environment. Live in a space of order. It doesn’t mean everything has to be perfect or expensive or anything like that. It just means generally orderly.

The second one is to wear nice clothes, and that doesn’t mean fashionable or special clothes. It just means things that you like, that fit you, that are clean, and that make you feel uplifted. You might think *What does it have to do with love?* but try it.

The third one is to eat good food, which does *not* mean “I only eat organic food” or “I’m a vegan.” It means food that delights you, food that has quality, food that honors you.

The fourth is—now it starts to go in a little bit different direction—to spend time with people who make you feel uplifted and to not spend time with people who make you feel worse about yourself. These can be very well-meaning people who you think are your friends, and they may be your friends, but if you walk away from them feeling diminished, then stop doing that. At least minimize time with them if possible. (I know it’s not always possible.)

The fifth way to rouse confidence in your daily life is to spend time in the natural world, which is not so easy in cities but you're still in the natural world. Of course, you can go to a park or look up in the sky or look into people's gardens. Spend time in the natural world because this restores a sense of order and harmony.

These are the ways to rouse confidence.

The second antidote to the Three Lords of Romantic Materialism is to cultivate kindness all the time. It's one thing to say "I'm going to be nice. Yes, I feel my own heart. I feel that I am a kind person. I'm going to be kind. I'm going to give kindness." Then you go outside and someone splashes water on you and you're like "Fuck you!" What happened to Miss Kindness?

It's so much more complicated than wanting to be nice. This is a lifetime pursuit and inquiry. What does it mean to be kind, and how do you do it? There are three facets to kindness. This is for your consideration. I'm making all this up, so you've got to take it with a grain of salt and check it for yourself in your own life.

The first quality of kindness is precision. This means seeing others without projection and allowing them to shift from moment to moment without my needing them to stay in any particular manifestation. Precision is awareness over and over and over, and attention more than anything, to

give you my attention, and to give you my attention. John Tarrant Roshi, the Zen teacher and poet, said, “Attention is the most basic form of love, and through it we bless and are blessed.” That’s the truth. There is no love without attention. Otherwise, you’re having some kind of relationship with yourself alone.

The second quality is gentleness. Gentleness doesn’t mean being milquetoast. It means being open. Gentleness means allowing people and circumstances to touch you. There’s a softness. When things happen to you and people say things to you, you hear them and feel them with some softness. Precision, gentleness, which means malleability in this sense, touchable.

The third quality is letting go, letting go of the need for a particular outcome, letting go of what you felt one second ago. “I like that. I didn’t like that.” Okay, that’s good. Now that’s gone. As you can apply these things over and over throughout the day—precision, gentleness, and continually letting go—kindness naturally arises.

Finally, I would like to suggest that you carry yourself so that we can all feel your heart beating in your chest. Let that happen. Let your wish for love be completely present in your face and in your speech and in your being. Don’t be afraid to do that.

As you let your wish for love shine through your eyes, you start to notice that other people have that same wish, and you can slowly begin to switch, shift, your wish for love from “I want to be loved, and then I will love” to “I want to give love.” This is the secret, guaranteed, no-fail solution to finding love. It is to look at your world with this question always in your mind: “How can I love?” not “Who can love me?”

This is especially difficult to do with the person that you’re in a relationship with, but the more you can do this—“How can I love?”—the more you take the only seat of power there is when it comes to love. You can’t control what people feel about you, and your heart is going to get broken in big and small ways no matter what you do. The only seat of power with love is as a lover.

I think the world needs us all to become lovers in this way. In this way, you create a life that is lousy with love, riddled with it, and there’s no corner that is bereft because you can always give love. This is how you create a life of love. Any questions?

AUDIENCE: *Where can I read more about this?*

SUSAN PIVER: You can read *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. It’s a really good book. There is not a lot on this but I wrote a book. I wrote two books. One is called *How Not to Be Afraid of Your Own Life*, which is about this. I also wrote a book called *The*

Wisdom of a Broken Heart, which is about relating with very strong emotions that come from lost love. (Author note: a few years after this talk, I wrote *The Four Noble Truths of Love: Buddhist Wisdom for Modern Relationships*.)

AUDIENCE: *I heard you say at another talk that a person is not a pawn in your happiness scheme. I really resonated with that sentence. I was like, that's awesome. Just the idea of what you were talking about when you first get into a relationship and maybe there's good things, and sometimes I think beginnings of relationships can be tough, too, depending on what people are bringing into it and what has happened before. I'd like to think of myself at this point as a relatively aware person, but still that crap of making someone a pawn in your happiness scheme pretty much is right there.*

SUSAN PIVER: This is a very rich area to explore. Actually, I don't mean to repeat myself, but I would say something like what I just said to the last person: bring your full awareness to those feelings. Try to drop any storyline that's connected to them. That's the hard part. That's the good part. It's genuinely painful. It yanks your relationship so quickly from the god realm and puts it firmly in the human realm. The human realm is where we want our relationships to take place because that's where we can love and be loved, and take off our clothes and connect and find out what intimacy is.

When it comes to these things, the disappointments and the grief, I try to walk this talk. They're not a problem because

whatever you encounter in your relationship, the good, the bad, and the ugly, is always a means for deeper intimacy. Not for deeper love, not for deeper happiness necessarily in the conventional sense because feelings of love come and go, but the ability to cultivate intimacy, like how much can I know you, how much of yourself will you show me, and how much of myself can I show you, how much of myself can I be in front of you? That has no end.

All these things, the disappointments and the delights, are devices for knowing each other better. Some things you find you're charmed by and some you're shocked by, upset by, or confused by. As long as you're both working on this intimacy piece as opposed to the will-you-make-me-happy piece, that's a good relationship in my book.

AUDIENCE: *Is it cruel to remain friends with someone knowing that you can't love them like they would like you to?*

SUSAN PIVER: Yes.

AUDIENCE: *Unfortunately.*

SUSAN PIVER: For a while. Once that person has moved on, has closed that door in their heart by whatever means, then it's good to be friends. The idea that you can hold on to certain parts of a love relationship and cut out others when only one person wants to do that, or even if both of you do, that's Machiavellian nuttiness.

You cannot subtract from a relationship. Time has to go by. You have to move to a different point in your life and then reencounter each other, I think. I'm saying this like I know what you should do, but that's my observation. It's the only way that it works and the only way it's worked in my life, and my friends' lives, and just what I see is you have to actually move on and then see what happens.

AUDIENCE: *On your last point about giving love: I think that I struggle with this idea, that there's this higher idea of love or this dream love. Ultimately if you're really lucky, it's the person you marry. In my relationship, I feel like it gets to a point where I think Well, they're not that ideal. They never were right from the beginning. I never thought they were the one or anything, but I dated them. Then you get to a point where you think Well, I know how to be a nice person. I can make this work. I can love them. But I'm still hoping for something.*

SUSAN PIVER: You want the romantic ideal? And then there's the reality of the person you're with, and you think maybe that the ideal is still out there?

AUDIENCE: *Yeah, like I'm still holding on or waiting.*

SUSAN PIVER: That's a tough one. I mean, it would be really easy to say there is no soul mate, there is no ideal, but I actually don't believe that. I think there is. I also don't think *Well, there's just one right person and they're out there somewhere looking for you.* There is a kind of magic that can happen

but only with certain people or one person. That, too, is impermanent.

You may meet someone that you feel this profound connection with. I hope that you do. Then they throw their clothes on the floor, and all the normal irritations of life come in with them. All I can tell you is for me—and I didn't get married until later in life—the person who I married I never would have guessed would be the person I would fall in love with.

You hear the advice to make a list of the qualities you want in another person. Don't do that, by the way. Don't make the list. It's really an act of horrible aggression. It's a way of saying "I will only see people that have these qualities, and everyone else I'm not going to look at. I'm not going to see them. I'm not going to take them in. I'm not going to give them credit for being humans." The list is a big load of crap. That said, it's good to be clear on what makes you feel loved.

“Three Ways Buddhism Can Help
with a Broken Heart”

BLOG POST, 2014

Nothing feels worse than a broken heart. Feelings of shame, remorse, grief, rage, and terror can overwhelm even the most stable human being. Heartbreak has the power to reframe a workable life as a disaster.

1. Develop a non-judgmental relationship with your mind. This is best done through the practice of meditation. When you're under the sway of strong emotion, you come into contact with a state of being that I like to call *Insane Obsessive Thinking*: *if only, I should have, what I really meant was, how dare she, I am a loser, you are a loser, love stinks...* On and on and on. It's really quite painful. Without addressing a mind run amuck, the chances of skillfully working with your feelings is kind of limited. So I suggest introducing a note of discipline to your everyday life by spending some time every day, not squashing your icky thoughts and promoting your good ones but simply watching your mind in a relaxed way—no matter how wild it gets, you can remain steady. This is what meditation teaches you how to do.

The mind of heartbreak is like a wild horse. You can't just jump on and expect to ride. It will throw you again and again. So instead you hang around for a while until a sense of trust develops. Meditation teaches you how to do this, too.

2. Stabilize your heart in the open state. When you regain some sense of dominion in your own mind, naturally your attention will turn towards that raging, screaming, searing thing in the middle of your chest—your heart.

One way to look at heartbreak is as love unbound from an object. Freed, it careens and ricochets and crashes into walls. Your capacity and longing for love is enormous and when you lose it, this is what you discover. You had no idea you could feel this raw, vulnerable, open...and it's the openness that is so precious.

Buddhism does not counsel closing back up, not at all. Instead, in recognition that this openness is the ground of lovingkindness, compassion, and the ability to connect deeply, it suggests you leave it broken and seek to stabilize it in the open state. Yes, leave it broken. The way to do this and not walk around sobbing all the time is through the practice of lovingkindness meditation. In this way, you begin to shift your search for love a tiny bit, away from “I want to find someone to love me” and towards “I want to find a way to give love.” With this slight transition, the whole world changes.

When most people say they are looking for love, what they mean is they are looking for someone to love them, and then they will return it. But you can turn this equation on its head entirely and have love in your life every single day by choosing to give it. This, by the way—giving love to

others—is the secret, guaranteed, no-fail way to heal your broken heart. Try it.

3. View your whole life as path. With a sense of clarity in your mind and stability in your heart, the third stage becomes something altogether different. There is no practice associated with this one. With mental clarity and emotional stability comes the ability to see your entire life as path. You have created the foundation for an entirely authentic life, one full of joy and sorrow, meetings and partings, giving and taking, and deep meaning. The dark power of heartbreak has led you there.

With this openness, you see that your life is telling a story. I have no idea what it is, and you may not either. But trust me—your life has a life of its own, and the violence of heartbreak has the power to shatter all illusions about who you thought you were and reintroduce you instead to who you really are. This is an extremely powerful situation.

With a broken heart, you see how vast your longing for love is and how impossible it is to make love safe. It's just not possible. So what do you do with these two truths? This is your path. No one can tell you how to reconcile them. The place to begin is by paying attention, by cultivating agendaless awareness of yourself, others, and of the flow of life. When you do so, you start to notice that every single day you are continuously cycling in and out of moments of falling in love and having your heart broken. Both are always present,

ADDITIONAL WRITINGS

shifting towards you and away, each one a tiny lesson on how to be fully alive.

I hope you find these writings useful and supportive as you make your way across this sacred ground.

TRY THIS: EXERCISES FROM THE AUDIOBOOK

TRY THIS:

Making Friends with Heartbreak
(from the introduction)

When you're ready, begin with these questions. Write each one in your notebook and try to answer it. Make your responses as long or short as you like.

If you don't know how to answer a particular question, just skip it for now. You'll have many chances to revisit it later.

My breakup occurred _____ days/months/years ago, and since that time my primary emotions have been _____ .

The last time I felt feelings such as these was when _____ .

What I notice when I compare these two experiences is _____ .

The thing that has been the most difficult for me since this relationship ended is _____ .

TRY THIS: EXERCISES FROM THE AUDIOBOOK

When I think about our breakup, the thought/s that plague/s me over and over is/are _____ .

I feel the pain of this loss most acutely when I _____ .

What I miss most about our relationship is _____ .

What I don't miss about our relationship is _____ .

The thing I regret most is _____ .

The unforeseen benefit of this breakup is _____ .

If I could take this person back right now, I would/would not and here's why: _____ .

The most important thing I need to tell myself right now is _____ .

Thank you for being willing to turn towards the truth of what you feel. I know it may be painful, but to touch in with the truth of what you feel (rather than simply trying to get away from it) opens the gate to healing.

TRY THIS:***What Is Going On Around Here?***

(from chapter 2)

The next time you feel a battle raging in your mind—be it about what happened between you, you and the future, you and yourself, or all of the above—pick up a pen and paper or open a blank document on whatever device is handy. Quickly, as quickly as you can, write down five things you notice in your surroundings and be very specific. Use your eyes, ears, and nose. For example, if I were to do this right now, here's what would be on my list:

1. A glass of tea is to my right, and it's still two-thirds full.
2. Out the window, it's still dark, but I think I see the first sign of sunrise.
3. The bed is unmade but, since I'm so recently out of it, I bet it's still warm under the covers.
4. A book, *Machik's Complete Explanation*, is on the desk, to my left.
5. My iPhone is charging.

See? Not exactly the most artful observations you've ever read, but these are the things I notice when I first look up from where I am, which happens at this moment to be a room in a retreat center in Colorado.

Now, make another list of five things in the environment, but this time take it a little slower.

As you look at the environment you're in, try to notice three details you hadn't seen before. Here are mine:

- The water bottle on my desk has a blue-and-green label.
- There's a slight paint scrape on the wall by the closet door.
- The heater makes a very low hum.

Scintillating stuff, no? Well, that's the point. While a major drama is taking place in your mind, what is actually happening is likely mundane. Which in this case is very good news. Coming out of your head and into your environment helps cut through anxiety for a few moments, and in those moments you have a chance to breathe.

TRY THIS:

Include Others

(from chapter 3)

The next time you notice that despair is driving you and you don't know how to believe in happiness anymore, slow down. Pick up a pen and piece of paper, and write down the wish that is at the center of your desperation: "I will find love again, I will, I will" or "There *has* to be someone out there for me." Then look at what you've written. It's likely that what you feel most strongly is how bereft you will be if this doesn't happen, which makes you cling harder and harder. Change it by imagining that your wish coming true will somehow make it easier for it to come true for those who also wish for what you do. Rewrite the wish to include them: "I hope that I and all who long for love will find it." Expand the wish to find happiness for yourself alone to a wish for all to find such happiness. Wishing something for yourself alone can leave you feeling disempowered and poverty-stricken. Wishing it for everyone is generous and rich. This is a way to relax anxiety and find some energy to move forward out of depression towards meaningful sadness and, perhaps, loving again.

TRY THIS:

Question Your Reality

(from chapter 4)

Comparing your pre-breakup to post-breakup life, answer these questions in your journal.

Before this relationship ended,

- I believed that my most important problems were _____ .
- my closest friends were _____ .
- I spent most of my spare time _____ .
- my number one aspiration was _____ .
- I ranked my priorities as follows [place a number by each priority; add ones that may be missing]:

- ___ Career/School
- ___ Family/Pets
- ___ Friends
- ___ Health
- ___ Money
- ___ Romance
- ___ Self-Discovery
- ___ Spirituality
- ___ Geopolitics/Social Justice
- ___ Global Warming

Now that this relationship has ended,

- I believe that most important problems are _____ .
- my closest friends are _____ .
- I spend most of my spare time _____ .
- my number one aspiration is _____ .
- I rank my priorities as follows [place a number by each priority; add ones that may be missing]:

- ___ Career/School
- ___ Family/Pets
- ___ Friends
- ___ Health
- ___ Money
- ___ Romance
- ___ Self-Discovery
- ___ Spirituality
- ___ Geopolitics/Social Justice
- ___ Global Warming

What, if anything, do you notice about how your concerns, friendships, and priorities have shifted—or not? Has the breakup caused any shifts that really trouble you? Delight you? Surprise you? Or has everything basically remained the same? Visit these questions every once in a while, and write any observations in your journal.

TRY THIS:

Finding Friends in the Dark

(from chapter 5)

Choose two or three books or songs by people who have demonstrated familiarity with the kind of despair you're experiencing. Keep them somewhere accessible and, when you feel that you are about to drown in darkness, turn to one of them. Try to find the line, passage, or chapter that expresses most clearly what you feel right now. Get out your journal and copy the salient lines into it. Describe in a few sentences or paragraphs how or why these particular lines pierce you to the core. See if you can rewrite the lines in your own words and make your own poetry. Or you could write a letter to the author or songwriter, explaining your situation and thanking them for their work.

And try this, too: periodically, open your journal and write the answers to these questions. Think of them as a kind of "Dark Night of the Soul" Mad Libs.

If my sadness could speak, what it would tell me today is

_____ .

The person I would most like to discuss my broken heart with is _____ .

The question I would ask them is _____ .

What I imagine they would say is _____ .

Oh yes, and you could also try this: once when I was attending a month-long meditation retreat, a student asked the meditation master a question about mental agitation during practice. The student was becoming frustrated that, two weeks into the retreat, he was still experiencing wave after wave of difficult emotions, like frustration, anxiety, and irritation. No matter how much he tried to relax, he kept his cranky pants on. “You could offer your negativity to the deities,” the teacher said, pointing to pictures on the shrine of the gods and goddesses of compassion, wisdom, and peace. “They love the display,” he said.

TRY THIS:

90-Second Clarity

(from chapter 6)

The first step in not letting difficult emotions freak you out is to relax with them. This does *not* mean that you stop feeling agitated. I recognize this sounds contradictory. How can you relax and feel agitated at the same time? Well, you can! You'll need two things: your journal and about 90 seconds.

The next time you feel an emotion that you just want to run from, open your journal, turn to an empty page, and make two columns. In the left-hand column, quickly write down the one to three thoughts that are bothering you the most. For example, you might include things like "I'll never, ever find love again" or "It's all my fault" or "There is something so wrong with me that I always choose the wrong person."

In the second column, list as quickly as you can where these emotions live in your body. If you pay attention, you see that every feeling has an accompanying bodily sensation. It may be as simple as "Adrenaline flooding my stomach" or as particular as "My right shoulder blade suddenly feels pinned to my spine." Be specific. Be creative. The moment you arrive at the correct physical analogy for your difficult emotion, turn all your attention to the sensation, not the thought that provoked it. Don't try to dispel it; instead, relax with it by turning your attention to it.

Paying attention is synonymous with offering lovingkindness. As Zen teacher and poet John Tarrant says, “Attention is the most basic form of love. Through it we bless and are blessed.”

Gradually, your physical sensation will begin to shift, lessen, and, perhaps, fade away. In this way, you allow the sensation to be what it is and play itself out by relaxing with it.

TRY THIS:

Flashes of Meditation

(from chapter 9)

The exercise I'm about to describe is impossibly simple and quite profound. I call it *flashing on the mind of meditation*. What this means is that instead of meditating (because you're driving, say, or on a deadline at work), you simply *remember* what it's like to meditate. For example, if I asked you right now what it feels like to meditate, what happens? To answer the question, your mind momentarily resettles itself in the "posture" of meditation and in this way you get a tiny hit, or flash, of the meditation. Repeatedly flashing on the mind of meditation (which takes less than a second) is the next best thing to a formal practice session, and it interrupts a train of thought before it runs away with you altogether.

The quest for self-improvement (to fix everything that's wrong with you so that you never get your heart broken again) can actually block you from achieving emotional balance. The effort to gather, tag, and rehabilitate your flaws can become an act of aggression, even hatred, towards yourself. The antidote is provided by mindfulness-awareness meditation, which is also the practice of self-acceptance without judgment or agenda. This is an important key to healing your heart.

TRY THIS:

It Never Lasts Long

(from chapter 12)

When the demon of betrayal raises its head and tries to get you to join it in an endless loop of misery and recriminations, try not to give it a storyline. It will burn itself up. Eventually. So when you feel agitated, try to sit with it. Let the agitation be there and make it the object of your meditation, just as breath is the object of attention in meditation.

Instead of breathing, bring your attention back to the agitation, over and over. Notice where it lives in your body, whether it feels light or dull, cold or hot. Notice how long it lasts. Pay attention and look for the moment it begins to change. This may sound like no fun, but try it and see what happens. When I have done it, it tends to shorten the suffering. When the theories and positioning statements arise, don't mock them and don't embrace them. Watch them like your breath. They will come, hang around, and then go. Let them.

TRY THIS:

Intensify, Intensify, Let GO

(from chapter 18)

As soon as you feel that the awful feeling (sorrow, rage, anxiety) is about to make an entrance, immediately tune into it as fully as you can. Invite it in. Feel it. Locate any bodily sensation that may be associated with it. Does it seem to be located in your stomach? Chest? Head? Take its pulse: If this feeling had a heart, would it be racing, pounding, or about to expire? Whatever it is, turn your attention to it as fully as you're able—and intensify it. Purposely amp it up. Imagine that you're lighting a match to it. If the feeling is hot, make it burn. If it's cold, let it turn to ice. If it's speedy, rev the engine. Intensify. Intensify. And then—poof—let it go. Just like when you open a super-clenched fist, you should feel a sense of cool relief, no matter how momentary.

Remember: Intensify. Intensify. And then let go. Repeat as often as you need to.

FROM BROKENHEARTED TO WHOLEHEARTED: A THREE-DAY AT-HOME PROGRAM

| *Prelude*

The evening before your retreat begins, set up your meditation area. At some point, have a seat on your meditation chair or cushion with your journal for a brief writing exercise. Settle down and take a moment to sit and appreciate wherever you are. What can you see, hear, smell? Noticing the space you're in is a simple way to come into the present moment.

Open your journal and write a response to this prompt:

The thing I most need to tell myself right now is _____ .

Write what comes to mind. It can be a few words or sentences—or more, if you feel so inclined. Just pose the request and then listen for the answer.

Let this be your offering for tonight. Tear this page out of your journal, fold it up, and place it somewhere close to your meditation spot.

Practice meditation for 10 minutes.

Dedicate the merit.

DAY ONE

When you get up, practice meditation for 10 minutes. Get out your journal, set a timer, and write for 15 minutes without censoring yourself. The words don't have to make any sense. Just keep your hand moving across the page, and if the only thing you can think of to write is "Why am I doing this?" then write "Why am I doing this?" and fill up the time. Let the words flow out onto the page. Then put them aside.

Next (or at a later point in the day, depending on your schedule) settle yourself for a writing session that will last about 30 minutes to an hour. In this exercise, you'll write the story of your relationship from a third person perspective. Begin with this line:

They met like this: _____ .

Then fill in how it happened. "They met like this: she was a bartender in a nightclub and he played guitar in the house band." Or "They met like this: she was in San Francisco for a business meeting with a new client who turned out to be the love of her life." Or "They met like this: they had known each other since high school, but life circumstances had led them in different directions until one day, by coincidence, she ran into her at a party."

Continue from there. Look at these two people as an observer. Write about how they felt about each other as they got to know each other. Did one of them develop romantic feelings first? Was one of them involved with someone else at the time? Was falling in love seamless or fraught with difficulty? How was this relationship different from her past relationships? How was it the same?

Remember to stay with the third person. The point of this exercise is to step back from “me” and observe the behavior and emotions that happened as the relationship developed. If you love to write, you can make this story super-long and detailed. If you do not love to write, just keep it simple. You can write the story in bullet points. If you feel like getting wildly creative, you can write the story in a dialogue, email exchange, a poem, or screenplay. Take it seriously, but have some fun with it.

When you think you’ve covered the early stages of the relationship—basically from the time you met or connected to the time of realizing you were in love—put the exercise aside for now. We’ll pick it up again later.

Now, write on a corner of a piece of paper or Post-it note one to three things that you feel grateful to your ex for, things that arose during the early stages of the relationship. You could list things like “I’m grateful to you for making me feel desirable” or “Thank you for that time I was at the airport and my flight was delayed and you drove out just to keep me

company” or “You were the first person ever to appreciate my sense of humor—thank you.” When you’ve made your list, fold up the piece of paper and place it on your altar.

Close this writing session with 10 minutes of meditation.

Spend the rest of the day or evening reading, resting, doing little things around the house. Keep it very, very simple. Don’t call friends. Don’t go online. Keep your mental energy to yourself. This may feel uncomfortable at first, but you will adjust. If you cry a bunch, it’s okay.

Before going to sleep, return to your cushion for a few more minutes and dedicate the merit of your day. Using whatever words feel right to you, rouse a sense of the work you did, of all the effort you put in or were unable to put in on this day. Offer the fruit of your practice for the benefit of all beings, that everyone currently suffering the pain of a broken heart will be liberated, uplifted, and held in the cradle of lovingkindness.

As you fall asleep, reflect on your day, on all the feelings, words, insights, and frustrations you encountered. Allow a simple prayer to develop and offer this prayer to the loving spirits of the night. Ask them to guide you towards healing as you sleep.

DAY TWO

This second full day of inward focus and simplicity will proceed much as the first day did. You'll continue practicing meditation, journaling, and writing out the story of your relationship. But towards the end of this day, we'll add a traditional lovingkindness meditation practice.

Practice meditation in the morning for 10 minutes. Get out your journal and write for 15 minutes without censoring yourself.

Sometime later in the day, pick up your journal for the second part of your writing exercise. Move your characters forward into the middle segment of their relationship. You can begin with this sentence:

And so they settled into their relationship.

They spent their time together doing things like _____ .

As they got to know each other, they came to see each other's good and bad qualities.

What they loved about each other was _____ .

What they didn't like about each other was _____ .

And go from there. Describe several memorable, wonderful times and several memorable, not-so-wonderful times. If you fought, write about a particular fight. Describe the moments of particularly deep connection. Remember, it's

your story; you're just writing it from a third party's point of view.

When you think you've covered the middle stages of the relationship, put the exercise aside for now. You should have covered the period between recognizing that you were in a relationship and the time things began to fall apart. Write about the relationship up to but not including this point. I know that it may be difficult to pinpoint this moment, so make your best effort. One or two incidents may stand out in your mind that you now know to be the beginning of the end, whether or not you knew it at the time. Mention those in brief. You'll explore them in greater detail in the final part of the writing exercise.

Tear off another corner of a piece of paper or grab a Post-it note to close this writing exercise by writing down one to three things that you feel grateful to your ex for, things that arose during the middle stages of the relationship. You could list things like "You taught me how to fight fair" or "When I lost my job, you were such a great friend" or "I know you made your best effort to be honest with me." When you've made your list, fold up the piece of paper and place it on your altar with the previous list. Close this writing session with a 10-minute meditation.

As the day winds down, do another 10-minute meditation session and spend the evening however you like. Remember: keep it simple.

Before going to sleep, return to your cushion and practice lovingkindness meditation. As you begin the practice, check in with the qualities of your broken heart. How does it feel right now to have a broken heart? Let those feelings fill you. As you move through the phases of this practice—offering lovingkindness to yourself, a loved one, a stranger, and an enemy—try to remain connected to this sense of brokenness and deep wish to love and be loved. When it's time to offer lovingkindness for all beings, offer it for all who struggle with heartbreak of any kind, whether it is related to romance or not. Finish by dedicating the merit of your day.

As you drift off to sleep, once again reflect on your day, on all the feelings, words, insights, and frustrations you encountered. Allow a simple prayer to develop and offer this prayer to the loving spirits of the night. Ask them to guide you towards healing as you sleep.

DAY THREE

When you arise, practice meditation for 10 minutes, followed by 15 minutes of free writing.

At a later point (depending on your schedule), pick up your journal to finish your story. Write about the final third of your relationship. Begin with this prompt:

She/he/they knew the relationship had hit a rough patch when _____ .

Then write about the first time there was an inkling that this wasn't going to work out. Describe some uncomfortable moments, big fights, or memorable emotional disconnects. Describe the breakup, the end of the relationship, and what was felt in its immediate aftermath. I know this may be painful. (Or not—there's no right way to feel.) Cry it out and don't be ashamed. (Or not.)

When you're finished with the story, once again I'm going to ask you to write out one to three things that you are grateful—yes, grateful—to them for what happened during this period. You could be grateful that they told the truth. You could be grateful that they showed their true colors. You could be grateful to them for having once loved you. You could be grateful that you no longer have to deal with the things that bugged you about them. Don't be snide, but be

honest. So on a third scrap of paper or Post-it, write those things down and place it on your altar with the other two slips of paper.

At the end of day three, practice meditation for a few minutes, followed by lovingkindness. For this final session, place your ex in each role during the practice—offer them lovingkindness as a loved one, as a stranger, and as an enemy. There are things you love or loved about them, and bring those into your practice when you send loving kindness to a loved one. There are ways they are completely unknown to you, now and even when you were together. Picture them as a stranger to you during the neutral-person part of the practice. And when it comes to the enemy portion, focus on the part of this person that may have hurt or angered you. Finish by offering lovingkindness to all parts of your ex.

Sit for a few moments in silence, resting your mind on your breath. Then gather the little pieces of paper with your words of gratitude. Using a fireproof bowl that is large enough to hold one scrap at a time without catching your home on fire, put the first list you made in there and burn it. Then the second list, and finally the third one. As these papers burn, acknowledge that, no matter what happens in the future, right now this relationship is over. And you are a stronger, more powerful person for having welcomed it into your life, experienced it, and watched it dissolve.

To close, let it all go, all of it. Practice meditation for 10 minutes in a state of openness and freedom.

Dedicate the merit. Congratulations.

Please remember this:
your heart is indestructible.

To stay in touch, sign up for my newsletter [here](#) or, to stay even more closely connected, join my online community, the Open Heart Project sangha, [here](#). It would be a joy to see you there.

