

Introduction

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This book is about how to deal with the trauma of a broken heart, the kind you experience when a romantic relationship ends. There is no other experience quite like this one. While it's not possible—or valuable—to compare types of loss, for many, the devastating and obsessive nature of a broken heart is a complete surprise. There is a literal sense of having been shattered, right in the middle of your chest. Although not physical, pain overtakes your body, making it sometimes feel heavy and dull or oddly light at other times, as something that has been burnt to a crisp and now floats in the air like ash. Most noticeably, heartbreak puts your own mind outside of your control. You fixate on certain thoughts or events, torment yourself with unanswerable questions like “what if?” and “how come?” and are susceptible to shocking waves of grief, without any warning whatsoever. You can no longer count on yourself to make it through a business meeting or the checkout line at the supermarket. Everyone and everything you encounter becomes a part of your heartbreak. A colleague's morning greeting feels like an assault on delicate nerves, missing the bus becomes testimony to your having been born under a bad sign, and every single couple in every single song, movie, and television show points out either the impossible beauty of love (if they're happy) or the inevitability of it blowing up in your face (if they're not). The whole planet partakes of your sorrow and there is nowhere to hide. The wall between your inner life and the outer world has come down and instead of seeing events as sometimes having to do with you and sometimes not, it all becomes extremely personal and intimate. If it feels like the world has turned

upside down, it's because it has. As it turns out, we will see that this is very good news. For real. I promise.

I'm speaking from first-hand knowledge. Although I've had my share of relationships and varying degrees of sadness when they ended, I've only had my heart broken once. When it happened, I realized that the aches and pains I'd experienced from past relationships had been like rainstorms compared to a hurricane. They were not the same thing at all. Sure, I had cried and moped and lost 10 pounds—the usual. I don't mean to make light of it, but when I experienced the real thing, I didn't just cry, mope, and lose my appetite—my world also fell apart and I wasn't sure I'd ever recover. (I did. I totally did. You will too!! I swear.)

When it happened, I was living in Austin, TX and working as a bartender in a nightclub that featured world-class live music seven nights a week. All the legends of the blues played there, backed by a stellar house band. I was in my mid-20s and had never gone to college and had zero prospects beyond the bar, but I was incredibly happy for the first time in my life. My early life was full of icky things like dreadful shyness, terrible grades, and painful relationships. I barely graduated high school and instead of educating myself to become a professional like everyone else in my family, I moved about in a cloud of depression, waiting tables, driving a cab, working as a delivery person, and, throughout, indulging a life-long interest in spirituality by reading countless books. But now, suddenly (and it was sudden—I had been traveling cross country on a lark and my car broke down in Austin), I found myself living in a town I loved, listening to music I loved, and working with people I came to love. (Shout out to Antone's: Austin's Home of the Blues.) Best of all, I fell in love. I fell madly in love with a guitar player in the house

band and he fell in love with me. I had had boyfriends before, but this was different. I had never known anyone like him. He was gentle and smart and funny and also cool and kind of tough. He was a musician's musician and only if you really knew how to listen to music would you ever even know how talented he was because he was all soul, no flash. Just my type. He hung out in bars but read Isaac Bashevis Singer and Saul Bellow. He was a Texan who had a thing for Jewish girls, and to him I was like ten Jews put together. And I was an East Coast girl who had a thing for Texan guitar players. *Perfect*. I adored him. He adored me.

The first time we ever kissed, I had an experience that was unforgettable, not just for how powerful it was in that moment, but for how perfectly it christened the nature of our relationship. Held in the circle of his arms, I drew back to look into his face and laid my hand on his chest, directly over his heart. At that moment, an inexpressible quality of wellbeing flowed from his chest into my palm and flooded me with an otherworldly sense of safety. I had never known such a feeling. With him, finally, I laid my burden down and gave myself over to love, completely. Throughout the course of our five-year relationship, every time I placed my palm on his chest, this feeling returned. Even sitting here right now, a gazillion years later, all I have to do is think of that moment and that feeling returns. (Shout out, Derek.)

Over the course of our relationship, several things happened that made us grateful for the circle of safety created through our embrace. I will not bore you with all the details which are irrelevant to this book, but among those things: I was almost killed in a car accident and he took care of me for many months and, a few years later, he was busted for being part of a gigantic marijuana-selling organization (which I had no

knowledge of) and ended up going to prison for 14 months. He had been trying to make enough money to provide for us, something not likely to happen on a guitar player's income. Death, drugs, lover's sacrifices, and prison: a very bluesy story indeed. We had many opportunities to take shelter in that embrace.

Even before the prison part of our relationship, however, we had slipped into an on-again, off-again kind of relationship. Although many heavy things bound us together, outside of truly being there for each other in an emergency, there was a basic incompatibility over how to make a regular life together, so we would break up and get back together, break up and get back together. Then during one of these break-ups, he started going out with someone else and, to this day I cannot tell you exactly why, my heart shattered into One. Million. Pieces. I was inconsolable. I was wracked with the worst case of jealousy, which I had no idea I was capable of; I was not a jealous person before or after this event. My sleep was absolutely destroyed—every night I had horrible nightmares about him being beyond my reach. My appetite was similarly decimated and I shrunk to a skeletal size zero. My friends set up a system to check on me, including a feeding schedule. (Once, three people came over to make me drink a fruit smoothie. They actually sat with me like I was a baby, coaxing me to take sips through a straw.)

Ultimately, after months and months of struggle, I simply could not get over it and moved over a thousand miles away from the place I loved so dearly, just to get away from this situation. This helped, but only a little. I am not exaggerating when I say that I did not draw breath for two years without also feeling the pain of this breakup.

My interest in spirituality reached an unprecedented peak. I think I was reading 2-3 books per week, searching for answers. Why did this hurt so much? How could I make

it go away? What was it about me that made this happen? All the childhood pain of thinking I was overly-emotional, pathologically introspective, and probably stupid resurfaced with a vengeance. As it seems to, the pain of this broken heart brought back the pain of *all* broken hearts, beginning with childhood. My mind rang round the clock with self-recrimination and shame and I was terrified I would never be able to put my heart back together. I couldn't find the courage to face the next day, to say nothing of the possibility of ever feeling one iota of happiness or taking a chance on love in the future. I was so sad. I was so afraid.

Then I read a book that said things like this:

For the warrior, this experience of sad and tender heart is what gives birth to fearlessness. Conventionally, being fearless means that you are not afraid or that, if someone hits you, you will hit him back. However, we are not talking about that street-fighter level of fearlessness. Real fearlessness is the product of tenderness. It comes from letting the world tickle your heart, your raw and beautiful heart. You are willing to open up, without resistance or shyness, and face the world.

In order to be a good warrior, one has to feel this sad and tender heart. If a person does not feel alone and sad, he cannot be a warrior at all. The warrior is sensitive to every aspect of phenomena—sight, smell, sound, feelings. He appreciates everything that goes on in his world as an artist does. His experience is full and extremely vivid.

Oh. A path that leads you, not away from strong emotion, but directly towards it? One that applauds the ability to feel deeply, not for its dramatic qualities, but for its vividness and intelligence? If the leading qualities of spiritual warriorship were sadness and loneliness, I could imagine quickly advancing through the ranks. For the first time, I

read something that made sense. It was extremely encouraging to think that the things I thought most awful about my situation—the overwhelming sadness and sensitivity—might actually be solutions.

What I learned from this book, *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior* (written by a Tibetan Buddhist teacher called Chogyam Trungpa) was that spirituality is not about being untouched by sorrow, but has more to do with relaxing and allowing the world to touch you. It's way braver to open yourself to the world than to wall yourself off from it. I had never heard of such a definition of courage. And I had never heard of a spiritual path that celebrated and invited strong emotion and actually explained how to work with it, not by disposing of it, but by making it part of the path. What had seemed like a liability was suddenly revealed as a strength and this Buddhist book was saying that instead of trying to toughen up, I could revel in my softness. The more I was able to own and proclaim my tenderness, the more of a bad-ass I would be. After all, if you try to prevent strong emotion, you're always on the defensive. If you never put up your guard in the first place, there is simply nothing to defend and therefore nothing to worry about.

So I began to study these Buddhist teachings on spiritual warriorship, a study I continue to this day. In the decade plus that I've been doing so, I've thought long and hard about this notion of the tender hearted warrior and have had lots of opportunity to apply these teachings. I've not ceased to be astonished at how wise, accurate, and practical they are, even for dealing with the most grievously broken heart and I want to share them with you. I've discovered that sadness is a form of gentleness, loneliness is a form of fearlessness, and heartbreak is a form of intelligence or wisdom. Ultimately, I hope you will gain what I have: the joy of knowing the fierce depths of your own heart.

If you're heart is broken and you are searching for strength, if you are prepared to go beyond hating yourself or him to find the message of wisdom contained in this terrible situation, you've come to the right place. Together, we will sail these treacherous seas and ride the waves of grief, anger, and despair. We will see that, this whole time, there has been nothing to worry about—your heart is indestructible. Guiding us, as mentioned, will be the ancient wisdom of Buddhism.

How can the principles of Buddhism do this? It is only by plunging into the depths of your heart that you can achieve the self-knowledge and genuine presence that are associated with wisdom and personal power. When your heart is broken, you really have no choice. Your insides have been turned upside down and your deepest fears and concerns, are no longer manageable. You can't run and you can't hide and so it is time to meet them. Buddhist practices can explain how to do this.

If we in the West are skilled at identifying and treating difficult mind states such as depression and anxiety, Buddhism is seriously adept at identifying and explaining how to cultivate positive mind states such as peace, joy, and loving kindness. Just as we can pinpoint exactly where depression or anxiety live in the brain, Buddhism can tell you the precise formula for creating a mind of peace and loving kindness. It's not woo-woo, it is the result of millennia of focus on positive mind states and practices and conditions that support them. From thousands of years of anecdotal evidence, it has been noted that the foundation for cultivating these qualities is the practice of meditation, which we'll go into

in some detail later in the book. You'll learn a practice called "Shamatha" (tranquilly abiding) meditation. I'll also introduce you to a meditation practice called "Maitri," which means loving kindness. Interestingly, the way to truly heal a broken heart is not to receive more love, but to give more. This practice explains exactly how to do that.

It's extremely important to note that in no way do you have to become a Buddhist or alter any current beliefs to avail yourself of these means. You don't have to accept any particular values or ideals, chant OM, wear funny outfits, or sit all twisted up like a pretzel. (Unless you want to.) Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, meaning there is no particular deity to "believe in" and follow. No one has to become a Buddhist to practice meditation, for example, which is a simple (though not easy) technique of sitting quietly with attention on the breath. You certainly don't need to be a Buddhist (or any other denomination, for that matter) to cultivate compassion and equanimity, two of the most important concepts in Buddhism. Wisdom, compassion, stillness, peace: these are not "religious" qualities. In fact, they are simply human qualities.

In addition to looking at what helps a broken heart, we'll also review what definitely does *not* help, and, by offering tips and exercises that can be done on the spot, hone in on what can help *right now*. When your heart is broken, no matter how high-tone an explanation you get for why pain hurts, what you really need are things to do on the spot when those waves of grief, anger, or fear hit you out of nowhere. These can be found throughout the book. And at the end is a 30-day program designed to help you do more than attain insight into your situation, but by suggesting daily practices and exercises, to bring what you've learned to daily life and change it into an experience of warriorship.

This book is arranged in three sections. The first chapters of the book, grouped under the heading “Relax” are about developing some gentleness toward your self and your situation—which basically sounds impossible when you’re completely agitated 24 hours a day, even when you’re asleep. But by “relax,” I don’t mean to stop feeling what you feel. To do that would require an act of Herculean will, which is pretty much the opposite of relaxing. I also don’t mean “space out,” which is what we often mistake for relaxing. Here, relaxing doesn’t mean absence of feeling or diversion from feeling, it means *allowing* whatever feelings are there to simply be there. You will be amazed at how relaxing this actually is, as opposed to combating your feelings.

The middle chapters are grouped under the heading, “See Where You Are.” With relaxation (remember, it means allowing!) as your foundation, you will be able to begin to understand where you are, what the source of pain might be, and what you could do about it. With this information, your situation will begin to cool down and you will discover some dispassion and natural toughness into your relationship with heartbreak.

Following this are chapters grouped together as “Be Where You Are.” After you see where you are, it is possible to *be* where you are, fearlessly. You can cultivate the courage to meet your life exactly as it is, no matter what. In this sense, fearlessness is the ability to open to and take delight in your world, in all the fabulous and insane things that happen within and around you, and even in your own broken heart.

With gentleness as your foundation and the commitment to clear seeing as your path, you establish the conditions for fearlessly owning your own experience. When you encounter sadness, you are fully sad. When you encounter joy, you are fully joyful. When

there are obstacles, you relate to them with precision and when obstacles dissolve, you can appreciate this properly.

As we progress, you will discover that gentleness, fearlessness, and wisdom are marks of spiritual warriorship and that the dark power of heartbreak can introduce you to them. If you stay with your broken heart, it will surely lead you down the path to wisdom.

Before we begin, I want to mention gender references. I've chosen to write this book from the perspective of women who have had relationships with men. So I say things like, "she really wanted him back," or "she was discovering her own strength." This is purely for the sake of simplicity so I didn't have to write, "he or she really wanted him or her back" or "she or he was discovering her or his own strength." This is not meant to exclude anyone suffering from a broken heart resulting from any kind of relationship.

Finally, I've had the privilege of studying with extraordinary spiritual teachers who have shared their wisdom with clarity and inconceivable generosity. If any part of my interpretation is flawed, it is purely due to my own lack of understanding, not any error in their teachings.