

## THE PROGRAM

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

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

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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

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

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

5:00—6:00 P.M. SET UP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clean up.

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

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

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

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

Please help me to \_\_\_\_\_ so that I may \_\_\_\_\_.

Please guide me to \_\_\_\_\_ so that I may \_\_\_\_\_.

Please show me \_\_\_\_\_ so that I may \_\_\_\_\_.

Please teach me \_\_\_\_\_ so that I may \_\_\_\_\_.

Here are some examples of things you might say:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By this merit may all attain omniscience.

May it defeat the enemy, wrongdoing.

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

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

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

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

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

*Day Two: The Day of Self-Remembering*

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

—VIRGINIA WOOLF

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

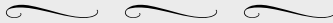
7:00—7:30 A.M.

Wake up. Fix your coffee or tea.

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

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

Dedicate the merit.



#### SHAMATHA INSTRUCTIONS

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

Minimize distractions.

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



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

Now you are ready to start.



8:00—8:30 A.M. FREE WRITING

*If you look into your mind, you will see it's like thousands of butterflies whirling about! You can hardly trace a single idea in this complexity.*

*A way to bring clarity to the mind is to write down your immediate thoughts and feelings in response to the events of the day, and then ponder them.*

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

—J. KRISHNAMURTI

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

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

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

As you get to know yourself, you will find—

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

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

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

4-25-06

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

4-26-06

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

4-27-06

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11:30 A.M.—12:00 P.M. SHAMATHA  
MEDITATION: 20 MINUTES

Dedicate the merit.

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

3:00—3:30 P.M. SHORT WALK

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

Dedicate the merit.

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4:00—5:00 P.M. JOURNALING EXERCISE:

PART 2

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

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

7:00—7:30 P.M. SHORT WALK

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

Dedicate the merit.

8:00—10:00 P.M. READ,  
RELAXATION

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

## *Day Three: The Day of Intention*

*A good intention clothes itself with sudden power.*

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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

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

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

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

Dedicate the merit.

Note that this session is a little bit longer.

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

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



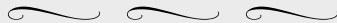
doing so helps to bypass your inner critic. Don't worry if you make a few false starts when writing with a prompt. Just keep trying. (This free writing session is a bit longer to provide time for experimentation.)

9:00–10:00 A.M. BREAKFAST, CLEANUP

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

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

Dedicate the merit.



#### MAITRI INSTRUCTIONS

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

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

May I be happy.

May I be healthy.

May I be peaceful.

May I live with ease.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dedicate the merit.

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



11:00—11:30 A.M. SHORT WALK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15 MINUTES BEFORE BED AT HOME:

JOURNALING

Recap how it was to make the transition back home.

Shamatha Meditation: 20 minutes

Dedicate the merit.

### *Day Four: The Day of Change*

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

—PABLO PICASSO

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

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

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

Dedicate the merit.

7:30—8:15 A.M. FREE WRITING

TODAY: CONTEMPLATE A PRECEPT

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Dedicate the merit.

#### BEFORE BED: JOURNALING

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

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

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

—DALAI LAMA

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

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

Dedicate the merit.

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

7:30–8:15 A.M. FREE WRITING

TODAY: CONTEMPLATE A PARAMITA

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

## *The Program*

6:00–6:30 P.M. MAITRI MEDITATION

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

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

BEFORE BED: JOURNALING

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

### *Day Six: The Day of Friendship*

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

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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

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

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

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

Dedicate the merit.

7:30—8:15 A.M. FREE WRITING

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

Go about your day as usual.

*The Program*

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

Dedicate the merit.

*Day Seven: The Day of Commitment*

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

—LAO TZU

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

Dedicate the merit.

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

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

Go about your day as usual.

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

Dedicate the merit.

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

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

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

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

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

APPENDIX:  
FREQUENTLY ASKED  
QUESTIONS

*Why should I meditate?*

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

*How often should I meditate?*

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

*What happens if I skip a day?*

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

*Is meditation hard to learn?*

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

*Do you have to sit on the floor?*

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Appendix

*What am I trying to accomplish?*

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

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

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

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

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

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Pema Chödrön. *The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001.
- Dalai Lama, and Howard C. Cutler. *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.
- Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. *Ruling Your World: Ancient Strategies for Modern Life*. New York: Morgan Road Books, 2005.
- Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. *Turning the Mind into an Ally*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003.
- Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1970.
- Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1973.
- Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*. Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala Publications, 1984.