

## **Part Four: From Brokenhearted to Wholehearted: Learning to Breathe Again**

### Chapter

*“It’s been a long, a long time coming, but I know that a change is gonna come.”*

–Sam Cooke

When it comes to a broken heart, the only way out is in. There is no way to fool the pain; it persists in the face of impeccable logic and willful vows to move forward. This brief (7-day, Friday to Friday) program is a way for you to begin to make friends with your broken heart, to move toward it rather than distance yourself from it. Although it can feel uncomfortable at first, this is actually the way to regain balance and draw strength from it instead of letting it defeat you.

One of the problems with heartbreak is that it tends to relentlessly speed up your thought processes (and subsequent actions). It’s easy to become so freaked out that your mind comes up with strategy after strategy to quell the pain you’re feeling: you should hate him, you should hate yourself, he’s incapable of love and doesn’t deserve you, it’s critical that you speak right away, it’s critical that you never, ever speak to him again, the solution is to start a massive weight loss program, quit your job, move to a new town, get him fired, throw out all his stuff—and on and on and on... All this speed leads to even more speed until you’re throwing everything you’ve got at this problem but, like tossing pebbles against a tidal wave, nothing actually stems the flow. Instead of further complicating matters with further complicated strategies, our program begins on a weekend by releasing all strategies and quieting the situation down by simplifying your mental environment through meditation, journaling, and hanging out at home.

The following days, Monday through Friday, will be about introducing some forms to your every day life that are meant to further pacify emotional turmoil. They include meditation and journaling, and also a daily gratitude ritual wherein you offer appreciation to your ex for whatever good he may have done you during the course of your relationship, and then, on the final day, a simple ceremony to release this person from your life. By the end of this week, you will have begun to let go and move forward, with kindness toward yourself and him. After all, until some kindness is included, you haven't moved on.

When I was struggling with a broken heart, I worked every strategy known to mankind to get the pain to stop. I tried a lot of things that didn't help: getting drunk, using affirmations like "I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine" when I was not, not, not, and throwing myself into work. I devoured every women's magazine article that listed 5 ways to get over a broken heart or 7 ways to move on for good—but advice like "keep busy," "pamper yourself," "make a list of all the things you disliked about him," "avoid negative thoughts," and the ridiculous "have a good cry every now and then" just did not cut it. "Keep busy" turned into "clean out your closets while pretending to be insane." Pampering myself turned me into a dipsomaniac with too many new clothes that I thought might tempt him back. Listing his bad qualities only reminded me of all his good ones. Pretending I could control my misery by putting icky thoughts aside was unbelievably claustrophobic and, ultimately, a lie. And have a good cry every now and then? How about ever now and every then? All of this "advice" made me feel like I should have a nice, neat system for handling my big emotions until they turned into trained pets on a leash. Uh, no. The ladies in the magazine articles may have been

burning the midnight oil at the office while wearing the perfect blouse and pencil skirt, dabbing every now and then at their eyes with a monogrammed hankie, but I was channel surfing on the couch in my house at 4 in the morning, wearing sweat pants and a bra, blowing my nose into a paper towel cause I'd burnt through all the Kleenex long ago. It seemed that no one was writing anything that could tell someone like me what to do. So I'm going to share with you what I did instead. After a lot of hit and miss efforts, I figured out a daily routine for myself that enabled me to explore my deeply painful feelings and give them expression. I'm going to suggest that you try this routine yourself for one week. If, at the end of that week you've found none of this helpful, abandon ship. Whatever you have found helpful, please keep doing.

Instead of trying to distract myself through busy-ness, self-indulgence, or wacky affirmations that were more wishful than positive thinking, I allowed my feelings to simply be as they were, at which point they began to lead me down a path to wisdom. My broken heart became my greatest spiritual teacher and I emerged from my little experiment a way stronger person who was both more vulnerable to love and less afraid of it. SWEET.

All the things I'm going to suggest to you are things I still do. And since becoming a Buddhist meditation teacher, I've learned many more ways to meet my feelings head on and turn even the nastiest ones into wisdom. So without further ado, let's check these things out. I'm going to lay them out for you in a 7-day program that is best done from a Friday to a Friday. My website has additional audio instruction and also examples of how to put these tools into play. Visit [susanpiver.com/wobh/TK](http://susanpiver.com/wobh/TK)

1. Meditation. This is the total cornerstone of the program and for working with heartbreak as a spiritual path. We won't be meditating *on* anything and there are no visualizations or affirmations—the meditation practice I suggest is Shamatha, the simple breath-awareness practice explained in Chapter \_\_. Appendix \_\_ has simplified Shamatha instruction that you can and should review before each practice session, just to refresh your memory.
2. Journaling. Every morning I wrote in my journal for three longhand pages. I still do this. This kind of writing is sometimes called “free writing” or “morning pages,” the phrase coined by Julia Cameron in her wonderful book, “The Artist’s Way.” It is simply 3 pages of stream-of-consciousness writing. The idea is to pick up a pen and paper (best to not use computer for this) and write down whatever comes to mind, as it comes to mind. There is no censoring, editing, or revising. You never have to read these words again and it totally doesn't matter if they make sense, are brilliant, profane, whiny, or mundane. Whatever they are, they are.
3. Writing the Story. Writing a story is different than journaling. I'm going to suggest that you write the story of your relationship—but from a third-person perspective. From the day you met until the day you parted, what would the story be if you were writing it as if it happened to someone else? I'll make suggestions for how to do this below.
4. Loving kindness meditation. As mentioned earlier in the book, Loving kindness meditation is about connecting with what is most painful in your life and simply wishing yourself well—and then expanding that to wish that all who suffer from

what is causing you pain. It's very intimate and extremely powerful. During this program we're going to practice traditional loving kindness, but with some suggested tweaks that are meant to soothe a heart that may feel bereft of love. Close to the end of the program, you're going to practice loving kindness for the one who broke your heart. I suggest that this is the most healing exercise you can possibly do.

### Preparation

During this week you will invite your broken heart to show itself as a step toward healing and strengthening. However it would be very easy to turn into a pity party rather than an act of empowerment. The former is pure self-indulgence while the latter is a sacred and soulful act. How can you figure out which one you're doing?

Before getting in to the specifics, I want to outline the three steps you can take to make any endeavor a sacred act. They are: making offerings; requesting blessings; and dedicating the merit. Let's look at each of these three steps and then review how to employ all three to create a week of sacred introspection and healing.

### *Making Offerings*

What does this mean? What constitutes an offering? And to whom are you making offerings? These are the questions.

An offering is something made out of respect. Our world does not actually teach us how to respect properly. "Respect your teacher." "You're not respecting me young lady." These things usually mean some version of "do what I say because I'm bigger and