Program Manual
Weeks 3 & 4

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Homework – Week 3

1. Practice mindfulness formally for 45 minutes every day for at least 6 days this week alternating between the Body Scan CD and the Mindful Yoga CD for guidance.

2. Practice mindful sitting meditation for 15-20 minutes a day.

3. Practice mindfulness of your breathing from time to time throughout the day

4. Read and reflect upon "Mindful Yoga" article by Jon Kabat-Zinn

5. Pay attention to what you put or bring into your body: how much, when and how often. Include food, drink, music, news, TV, worry, fantasy, etc. Our habits of consumption reveal many facets of our conditioning, our attachments.

6. Cultivate an intention to increase your level of awareness during daily activities such as: eating, showering, brushing your teeth, washing dishes, taking out the garbage, reading to the kids. . .

Reflections

The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean-- the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down--
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Mary Oliver, The House Light Beacon Press Boston, 1990.

Mindful Yoga

by Jon Kabat-Zinn

For a number of years in the late 1970s, Larry Rosenberg and I taught back-to-back evening classes in a church in Harvard Square. He would teach vipassana meditation (a Buddhist practice of mindfulness), and I followed with mindful hatha yoga. The idea was that everyone would take both classes. But Larry and I were always bemused by the fact that most of the people in the meditation class didn't want to do the hatha yoga, and most of the "yogis" didn't come for the meditation class.

We saw the hatha and meditation as different but complementary doors into what is ultimately the same room--namely, learning how to live wisely. Only the view from the doorways was different. We had a definite sense that the meditators would have benefited from paying more attention to their bodies (they tended to dismiss the body as a low-level preoccupation). And the hatha yogis, we felt, would have benefited from dropping into stillness for longer stretches of time and observing the arising and passing away from moment to moment of mind/body experience in one sitting posture. We didn't push our view of this on either group, and we tried not to be too attached to who showed up for what, especially since we saw the essence of what we were both teaching as identical. Nonetheless, it was an interesting phenomenon.

Over the years, my own experiences of combining mindfulness meditation practices and hatha yoga into a seamless whole prompted me to experiment with different ways of bringing these ancient consciousness disciplines into contemporary mainstream settings. I wanted to explore their effectiveness in transforming health and consciousness. How might they be connected?

For one thing, the hatha yoga had the potential, I thought, to help reverse the huge prevalence of disuse atrophy from our highly sedentary lifestyle, especially for those who have pain and chronic illness. The mind was already known to be a factor in stress and stress-related disorders, and meditation was known to positively affect a range of autonomic physiological processes, such as lowering blood pressure and reducing overall arousal and emotional reactivity. Might not training in mindfulness be an effective way to bring meditation and yoga together so that the virtues of both could be experienced simultaneously as different aspects of one seamless whole? Mindfulness practice seemed ideal for cultivating greater awareness of the unity of mind and body, as well as of the ways the unconscious thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can undermine emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

This personal exploration led ultimately to developing a clinical service for medical patients in which we used relatively intensive training in mindfulness meditation practices based on the vipassana and Zen traditions, along with mindful hatha yoga, with medical patients suffering with a wide range of chronic disorders and diseases. This program evolved into an 8-week course, now known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).

MBSR is now offered in over 200 medical centers, hospitals, and clinics around the world. Many of these programs are taught by physicians, nurses, social workers, and psychologists, as well

as other health professionals who are seeking to reclaim and deepen some of the sacred reciprocity inherent in the doctor-caregiver/patient-client relationship. Their work is based on a need for an active partnership in a participatory medicine, one in which patient/clients take on significant responsibility for doing a certain kind of interior work in order to tap into their own deepest inner resources for learning, growing, healing, and transformation.

Hatha yoga has played a large and critical role in this work from the very beginning, and many yoga teachers have been drawn to teach MBSR. Through a seamless integration of mindfulness meditation and hatha yoga, MBSR taps into the innate potential for healing that we all have. It mobilizes our ability to cultivate embodied wisdom and self-compassion; and by so doing it teaches us to live our life and face whatever arises with integrity, clarity and open-hearted presence.

Mindfulness lies at the very core of Buddhism in all its forms. Yet its essence is universal in that it is about refining attention and awareness. It is a powerful vehicle for cultivating deep insight into the ultimate causes of suffering and the possibility of liberation from that suffering.

The ancient stream of hatha yoga practice is another of the great consciousness disciplines. My first taste came in 1967 at a karate school in Boston, where a young Vietnam veteran named Tex was using it as a warm-up. I quickly fell in love with the yoga. I was training in the Zen tradition at the time, and the two seemed to complement each other perfectly. That conviction has only deepened over time.

The appeal of hatha yoga is nothing less than the lifelong adventure and discipline of working with one's body as a door into freedom and wholeness. Hatha yoga was never about accomplishment or perfection, or even about technique by itself. Nor was it about turning one's body into an elaborate pretzel, although the athleticism that is possible in hatha yoga (if one can manage to steer clear of narcissism) is a truly remarkable art form in its own right. Certainly, we are seeing a marvelous flowering of interest in many different kinds of hatha yoga in mainstream circles now. The question is, how mindful is it, and is this flowering oriented toward self-understanding, wisdom and liberation, or is much of it just physical fitness dressed up in spiritual clothing?

Mindful yoga is a lifetime engagement--not to get somewhere else, but to be where and as we actually are in this very moment, with this very breath, whether the experience is pleasant unpleasant, or neutral. Our body will change a lot as we practice, and so will our minds and our hearts and our views. Hopefully, whether a beginner or an old-timer, we are always reminding ourselves in our practice of the value of keeping this beginner's mind.

Excerpted from the article "Mindful Yoga Movement & Meditation" ©2003 by Jon Kabat-Zinn, first published in Yoga International, Feb/March 2003. Visit www.yimag.org

Suggested further reading: ***Mindfulness Yoga*** by Frank Jude Boccio (This book touches in depth on my favorite subject: mindfulness. To me yoga is the practice of mindfulness...to be present in each moment as it unfolds. "Mindfulness Yoga" is an excellent guide to remind us of the power of living in the moment as we practice on and off the mat.)

Homework – Week 4

1. Practice mindfulness formally for 45 minutes every day for at least 6 days this week using the Guided Meditation CD. You may also choose to alternate a couple of days with the Yoga CD.

2. Read and reflect upon "Chaos or Calm" article

3. Read and reflect upon "Working with Resistance" article

4. Continue to cultivate your intention to increase your level of awareness during daily activities such as: eating, showering, brushing your teeth, washing dishes, taking out the garbage, reading to the kids. . .

Reflections

- Worrying about the future is like trying to eat the hole in a doughnut. It's munching on what isn't. - Barry Nail Kaufman

- Unlike achieving things worth having, to achieve a thing worth being usually requires long periods of solitude. - Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman

- Man is disturbed not by things, but by his opinion of things.
  - Epictetus, First-Century Roman Philosopher

- In the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few.
  - Shunryu Suzuki

- To live without mindfulness is to live as if we were dead already.
  - Sharon Salzburg

Chaos or Calm: Rewiring the Stress Response

By Carrie Demers, MD

Remember the tale "The Lady or the Tiger?" As it ends, the hero is standing before two identical doors: one conceals a beautiful maiden; the other, a ferocious tiger. The hero must open one of these doors—the choice is his—but he has no way of knowing which will bring forth the lady and which will release the tiger.

I'm sometimes reminded of this story when a patient is describing one of the symptoms of chronic stress: headaches, indigestion, ulcers, tight muscles, high blood pressure or some combination of these. When I point out that the symptom is stress-related, the patient seems resigned—stress is such a constant in most people's lives that all the doors seem to have tigers lurking behind them. Most of the people who find their way to my office know the fight-or-flight response is hardwired into our nervous system and many have come to accept a constant feeling of tension as normal, even inevitable.

It isn't. Like the hero in the story, we have a choice. There is another door, another response to the challenges of everyday living that is also hardwired into our nervous system. And unlike the hero, whose destiny rests with chance, we can discover which door is which. A general understanding of the nervous system and how it responds to stress, coupled with training in three fundamental yoga techniques, make it possible for us to distinguish one door fron1 the other. Practicing these techniques gives us the power to choose the lady while leaving the door that unleashes the tiger firmly closed.

Releasing the Tiger

The autonomic nervous system controls all the body's involuntary processes: respiratory rate, heart rate, blood pressure, gastric juice secretion, peristalsis, body temperature, and so on. It has two main components or branches—the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. When we feel stressed, our brain activates the sympathetic nervous system, which has come to be known as the fight-or-flight response. This causes the adrenal medulla to secrete adrenaline (also called epinephrine), a hormone that circulates through the bloodstream, affecting almost every organ. Adrenaline revs up the body to survive a threat to life and limb: The heart pumps faster and harder, causing a spike in blood pressure; respiration increases in rate and moves primarily into the chest; airways dilate to bring more oxygen into the body; blood sugar rises to provide a ready supply of fuel; some blood vessels constrict to shunt blood away from the skin and the core of the body, while others dilate to bring more blood to the brain and limbs. The result? A body pumped up to fight or run, and a mind that is hyper alert.

This response is a crucial reaction to a life-threatening event: when we find ourselves face-to-face with a mountain lion, the stress response dramatically increases our chances of surviving. And we've all heard stories of fantastic feats: the mom lifting a car off her trapped child, the firefighter carrying a man twice his size from a burning building. These are the benefits of the

sympathetic nervous system. Any time we respond quickly and decisively when a life is at stake, this is the system to thank.

The fight-or-flight response is meant to be triggered sporadically, in those rare moments when we are actually in peril. Ideally, it remains dormant until the next close call(weeks, months, or even years later!). But in many of us this response is triggered daily, even hourly. Some people— soldiers, tightrope walkers, members of a SWAT team, for example—do find themselves in life- or-death situations frequently. But for most of us, such situations are rare: a mugging, a traffic accident, a close-up with a bear in the backcountry. Once the threatening event is over, hormonal signals switch off the stress response, and homeostasis is reestablished.

The problem is that for many of us the fight-or-flight response rarely switches off, and stress hormones wash through the body almost continuously. The source of our stress is psychological rather than physical—a perception that something crucial to us is threatened. Fear of the unknown, major changes in our circumstances, uncertainty about the future, our negative attitudes—all these are sources of stress. Today we worry more about our jobs, our relationships or getting stuck in traffic than we do about fighting off a wild animal, but even though the perceived threat is psychological, it still triggers the archaic survival response.

The upshot is that our bodies are in a constant state of tension, ready to fight or flee, and this causes a host of physical problems. You can see what some of these are if you look again at what happens when adrenaline courses through the body: elevated blood pressure, rapid shallow breathing, high blood sugar and indigestion. What is more, adrenaline makes our platelets stickier, so our blood will clot quickly if we are wounded. This increases our chances of surviving a physical injury—but chronically sticky platelets are more apt to clot and create blockages in our arteries. And this sets the stage for a heart attack or a stroke.

The damage doesn't end there. When we are constantly in fight-or-flight mode, the adrenal cortex begins to secrete cortisol, a steroid whose job it is to help us adapt to a prolonged emergency by ensuring that we have enough fuel. Cortisol acts on the liver and muscle tissues, causing them to synthesize sugars (glucose) and fats and release them into the bloodstream. From the body's viewpoint, this is a reasonable response— dumping fat and sugar into the blood will help us survive a shipwreck, for example. But when this fuel is not metabolized in response to prolonged physical duress, disease results. Excess sugar in the bloodstream leads to diabetes, and excess fat to high cholesterol/high triglycerides. Both conditions boost our chances of developing heart disease.

The steroids cortisol and cortisone quell inflammation in autoimmune diseases and asthma, and so are useful when used infrequently and for brief periods, but their constant presence in the bloodstream suppresses immune function. This causes the white blood cells—those hardy defenders against bacteria, viruses, cancer cells, fungi, and other harmful microorganisms— to become sluggish. And this makes us more prone to disease, especially cancer and chronic infections like Lyme disease, hepatitis, and the Epstein-Barr virus.

Sounds grim, doesn't it? It is. It's a tiger A chronically activated sympathetic nervous system keeps the body under constant pressure. If we ignore early warning symptoms—tight shoulders, digestive upset, recurring headaches, an increasing tendency to lose our temper or become easily upset—sooner or later the tiger will tear us up. But we can make another

choice. The autonomic nervous system has another component, the parasympathetic nervous system. Rather than living under the tyranny of a ramped-up sympathetic nervous system, we can learn to trigger the parasympathetic system, the rest-and-digest response, instead.

Just as the fight-or-flight response automatically kicks in at the threat of danger, the rest-and-digest response automatically responds to our sense of equilibrium. When it is activated, the heart rate drops, I blood pressure falls, and respiration slows and deepens. Blood flow to the core of the body is reestablished— this promotes good digestion, supports the immune system and infuses us with a sense of well-being.

We unconsciously achieve this state on vacation, in the throes of a hearty laugh, or in deep sleep. It feels good, and it offers a much needed respite from the hectic pace we set for ourselves. But we have come to accept stress as the norm and to expect the feeling of relaxed well-being to come about only sporadically—and so it does. We release the tiger a dozen times a day, even though the other door is also there in every moment. Once we learn to open it at will, we can override the harmful habit of triggering our stress response by activating the rest-and-digest component of our nervous system instead.

Greeting the Lady

I use a variety of natural therapies in my medical practice, but the basic treatments are drawn from yoga— stretching, breathing, relaxation and meditation—and these techniques are especially effective when it comes to managing stress. You already know from personal experience that aerobic exercise is excellent for dissipating stress-created tension, and that sugar, caffeine and spicy food contribute to jangling your nervous system and shortening your temper. You are probably also familiar with the relaxing effects of practicing yoga postures - they teach us to move and stretch our tense, strained bodies and to focus on the breath. But do you know that breathing slowly and deeply is the easiest way to activate the rest-and-digest system?

That is one reason yoga classes are so popular—they soothe frazzled nerves and quiet anxious minds. But yoga also works at an even deeper level: it reestablishes healthy breathing patterns, teaches us to relax consciously and systematically, and gives us the opportunity to explore the inner workings of our minds through meditation. These techniques, both separately and in combination, nourish and strengthen the parasympathetic nervous system so that the relax-and- digest response becomes our normal mode. The fight-or-flight response is then reserved for emergencies, as nature intended. So let's take a look at some ways we can open Door Number Two.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Babies and young children breathe deeply and fully, using the dome shaped diaphragm that separates the chest and abdominal cavities to move air in and out of their lungs. Their bellies are relaxed and move in concert with their breath. This is the natural, healthy way to breathe. But as we grow up we are taught to constrict the abdomen (Pull your stomach in and stand up straight!), and that training, coupled with an unconscious tendency to tighten the belly when we experience stress, disrupts the natural flow of our breath. With the abdomen pulled in, the breath is confined to the upper portion of the lungs (from about the nipple line up). And because this breathing pattern is perceived by the body to be a stress response, it reinforces the fight-or-flight reaction.

Diaphragmatic breathing, on the other hand, activates the relax-and-digest response by stimulating the primary mediator of the parasympathetic nervous system, the vagus nerve. This nerve travels from the brain to nearly all the thoracic and abdominal organs ("vagus" comes from the same root as "vagabond"), and triggers a cascade of calming effects. Most of the time we wait for it to be activated by something pleasant and hope for a trickle-down effect, not realizing that the nerve (and hence the entire parasympathetic nervous system) can be turned on from the bottom up by diaphragmatic breathing.

The fight-or-flight response is meant to be triggered sporadically, in those rare moments when we are actually in peril.

Of all the processes regulated by the autonomic nervous system (heart rate, blood pressure, secretion of gastric juices, peristalsis, body temperature, etc.), only breathing can be controlled consciously. And in doing so, we stimulate the branch of the vagus nerve that innervates the diaphragm (which carries a message to the other vagus branches and the brain) to activate the entire rest-and-digest response. This is why the first step in reversing our chronic stress response is to learn to breathe again the way we were born to breathe.

If you haven't been trained in diaphragmatic breathing, find an experienced teacher and practice every day until it once again becomes a habit. Then, as you develop the skill of breathing from the diaphragm in the course of your daily activities, you will begin to experience your breath as a barometer for the nervous system. As long as you are breathing deeply and from the diaphragm, you will find that you can access a feeling of calm and balance even when you are confronted with an unpleasant situation. And you will also notice that if you allow your breath to become shallow by breathing from your chest, anxiety creeps in, your muscles tighten, and your mind begins to race and spin. When this agitated breathing is prolonged, it creates an unsettled and defensive outlook on life. Once you know this from your own experience, you can make a different choice.

Systematic Relaxation • to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, diaphragmatic breathing makes an excellent beginning. But we need to do more, particularly when we have spent years unconsciously flinging open the door to the tiger's cage. Daily periods of relaxation are a must. When I tell my patients this, many of them say they relax while they watch TV or read or knit or socialize. The problem is that while these activities distract the mind from its usual worries (and so provide some relief), they do little to relieve the stress we hold in the form of muscular contraction and tension.

To reverse well-established habits of holding tension in our bodies, we need to work with what the yogis call the energy body (pranamaya kosha). Systematic relaxation practices offer a precise, orderly technique for releasing tension from head to toe. There are a number of these techniques, and like all yoga practices, they are best learned from an experienced teacher, and then honed through patient practice. They range in complexity from simple tension/relaxation exercises and point-to-point breathing practices to techniques that require making fine distinctions among various points in the energy body. But all involve moving our attention through the body in a methodical fashion, usually while resting in shavasana (corpse pose). And all require that we withdraw our attention -from the drama of our lives. For the duration of the practice, we let go of our memories, plans, worries, and fantasies, and focus on what we

are doing here and now as we move our awareness calmly and quietly from one part of the body to another.

Breathing from the diaphragm, while systematically bringing our full attention to one point in the body after another, not only releases tension and fatigue in the places where we rest our attention, it also augments the energy flow among those points. This promotes both healing and cleansing. Further, because full engagement with a systematic relaxation practice requires that we clear our minds and attend fully to the present moment, we are also refining a skill that opens the door to meditation.

Meditation

Since stress begins with the perception that our lives (or at least our sense of wellbeing) are in danger, working with the mind to alter our perceptions is the most powerful technique for quieting our stress response. Most of what activates our fight-or-flight response is not a matter of life or death. We may feel pressured to accomplish a certain task or worried about what will happen at tomorrow's meeting—but our lives don't depend upon the outcome. With rare exceptions, the habitual thought patterns that create the experience of stress for us are overreactions to events in our lives. Instead of responding in a way that floods the body with adrenaline, however, we can reframe the experience to make it not only less stressful, but also more accurate in reflecting what is really happening ("I'm only in a traffic jam, I'm not at death's door.' 'I want to please this person, but if I don't, I'm not going to be fired.") This goes a long way toward quieting the fight-or-flight response, and it is a skill that comes with experience in meditation.

Meditation helps us understand our mental habits by giving us the opportunity to observe them from a neutral vantage point. This is why I often prescribe meditation to my patients as a way to manage stress.

If we ignore early warning symptoms, sooner or later the tiger will tear us up.

I don't mean to minimize meditation as a means of spiritual transformation, but in its early stages, one of the most delicious benefits of meditation practice is seeing that it is possible to avoid getting sucked into the banter and hysteria of our mental chatter. Meditation allows us to witness that banter—to observe it impartially—without being smack in the middle of it. It's like watching a rainstorm from a warm, dry room. The peace we feel when we are watching our minds rather than identifying with our thoughts is the peace at our core.

When you are fast learning to meditate, the mind will wander away from the object of meditation to dwell on some other thought. This will happen again and again. Your job is to gently and repeatedly bring your attention back to your object of meditation, and to do it patiently, without judgment. Sometimes it may seem as if the distracting thoughts are like movie images projected onto a personal viewing screen in your mind. And some may be strange and wild. But you are in the rest-and-digest mode, and as strange as they are, your projections don't trigger the fight-or- flight response. The ability to simply observe them is evidence that they aren't you. And the ability to distinguish between the inner observer in you and the chaotic jumble in your mind I means that you can respond with equanimity, rather than react and flood your body with stress hormones.

The more we practice meditation, the more we will be able to discriminate between what is real and what is not—between what is truly life-threatening and what is just a habitual overreaction. And once we begin to see that almost everything that triggers our sympathetic nervous system is merely a habitual overreaction, we can begin to make different choices. Instead of reacting to an unpleasant event, we can cushion the jarring effect on our nervous system by observing it in the same way that we observe our mental chatter in meditation and by consciously breathing from the diaphragm.

This is likely to prove challenging in the beginning. When your spouse or a coworker snaps at you, you may find yourself halfway into an angry retort before you notice that you have switched to chest **Breathing**. Then you need to remind yourself to breathe from the diaphragm and to find a neutral vantage point. But this skill comes with time, particularly when you are sitting for meditation regularly, practicing diaphragmatic breathing, and punctuating your day with a systematic relaxation practice. And as you choose to activate your rest-and-digest response consciously and continuously, you will find yourself in fight-or-flight mode only when your car skids on a patch of ice or the cat knocks over a candle and sets the curtains on fire. Your health will improve, to say nothing of your outlook on life. You have learned to choose the right door.

Carrie Demers, M.D., is a board-certified internist who is the medical director of the Center for Health and Healing at the Himalayan Institute, where she uses yoga, ayurveda and other holistic techniques in her medical practice. This article appeared in *Yoga International* March 2004.

Working with Resistance

Working with Resistance
By Sally Kempton

Lately, I've been learning a lot about resistance. My cat, Leo, has an infection, so every day he has to take an antibiotic pill. Cats are picky about what they put in their mouths, and Leo hates the taste of the pills. When he sees one coming, he closes his mouth into a tight slit, and extends his claws in fighting position. Even after we've managed to get the pill in his mouth, he'll often hide it in his cheek, and then spit it out.

Leo's daily fight with the pills has begun to seem like a metaphor for all the ways we resist life-not just life's pills, but also life's sweetness. It's not just that we resist facing, say, a difficult health issue, or the need to leave a relationship or a job. We've also been known to resist a new opportunity, a new friend or lover, an emerging state of inner expansion, even when we sense that something good could happen if we opened up to it. We resist creating space in our overscheduled lives. We resist our own intuitive understandings, and also the inward pull into meditation--often out of an unexamined fear of what we might find if we let ourselves move into our inner spaces. Especially, I've noticed, we resist letting go of our limitations--real

or imagined--and stepping into our own largeness, our greater self.

Admittedly, there are times when resistance is an appropriate; if we didn't have the ability to say "No," to resist or filter some of what comes at us, we'd all be overloaded and overwhelmed. The body's immune system is built precisely for this purpose: to resist outside invaders in the form of bugs and bacteria. So is our psychological immune system, which by the time we're grown-up usually consists of a series of energetic boundaries and gateways that we've built to keep out invasive or hostile energies, potentially toxic situations and painful relationships. Obviously, if we didn't have that network of resistances, we'd be vulnerable to every form of suggestion or coercion, subtle and obvious.

The problem arises when we don't know when or how to let down the boundaries. Then our resistance stops being a useful filtering device, and becomes armor. Every one of us has some calcified resistance, and for some of us, resistance can become a rigid of energetic barrier that closes us off from change, from new ideas, from intimacy with people and situations that could take us deeper into our own truth. That's when we stagnate. And we can stagnate in any area of life--in our work, in our relationships, or in our spiritual practice.

What Are You Resisting?
So when I notice myself feeling constricted, or stagnant, or stuck-all words for the same phenomenon- I usually begin by asking myself what it is that I'm currently resisting. If you try this yourself, you'll probably find that you know the answer. We usually know what we're resisting-often some necessary change, a shift in the nutrition you're giving yourself, a part of your body or psyche that is begging to be stretched.

Once you've determined where the resistance is lodging, you can start to work with it. The classic approach to resistance is to breathe into the feeling and say, on the out breath, "Let go!" However, for me, this doesn't work unless I've first spent some time actually listening to the resistance, getting to know it. The best way to do this is by asking questions and letting resistance 'talk' to me.

Dialoguing with Your Resistance
The idea of dialoguing with your resistance might sound slightly weird; nonetheless, you might like to try it. Think about something in your life that you sense would be good for you, but that you're resisting. It might be a change of some kind, or perhaps a shift in diet or in your personal practice, or perhaps in your attitude towards your family life, your relationship (s), or yourself. Once you've noticed the resistance, let yourself feel the actual sensation of resisting.

What are you resisting?
What does the resistance feel like in your body? Once you've touched into the feeling-space of resistance, ask, "What do you have to tell me? What is this resistance about? Why are you there?" Ask the question, and then just wait to see what arises. It may be a feeling, or a thought, a belief or a fear. It might be a practical sense that maybe now is not the time, or a desire to make the change more familiar before you give into it. Keep asking until you feel that you've sensed as much about the resistance as possible. Feel that you are actually listening to your resistance. Then ask, "What would happen if I let go?" Notice what arises. Then ask your resistance, "Would you be willing to let go--just for a moment?" As you ask this

question, notice what arises in the wake of the question. There should be a sense of ease, relaxation, perhaps small, perhaps greater than you thought possible.

I've found that as I become present to my resistance in this way, with this questioning attitude, something always does let go. Resistance eases. Sometimes, I also discover that the resistance comes from a deeper intuition that something that seems desirable isn't quite right. But I'd never have found this out if I hadn't asked. Just as people want to be heard, so do our psychological states. Sometimes it's enough just to be willing to listen to what our resistance wants to tell us. That might be all it takes for resistance to be willing to let go.

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