

## 7 week proposed Schedule: The Five Invitations Study Group

Week 1: The First Invitation: Read the Introduction and the first chapter. Read through page 26

Week 2: The First Invitation cont. Read chapters 2, 3, & 4. Read through page 72

Week 3: The Second Invitation: Read chapters 5, 6, & 7. Read through page 114

Week 4: The Third Invitation: Read chapters 8, 9, 10, & 11. Read through page 180

Week 5: The Fourth Invitation: Read chapters 12, 13, & 14. Read through page 231

Week 6: The Fifth Invitation: Read chapters 15, 16, & 17. Read through page 276

Week 7: Read Epilogue, finish book. Closure. Potluck shared lunch. Are there next steps for the group?

### ***Group discussion guidelines:***

- Be encouraged to speak leanly and listen generously.
- These are highly personal issues. Be supportive. All thoughts and feelings are welcome. This is a discussion on values and what matters to each person.
- Speak from the heart. Be yourself.
- Please commit to attending the meetings, or if unable to be here physically, plan to do the reading and answer the study questions and send them to group facilitator for sharing.
- Any suggestions for additional guidelines?

**Week one:**

1. **Welcome**
2. **Review discussion guidelines**
3. **Discuss attendance, calendar**
4. **Provide course outline.**
5. **Please share what your emotion is about tackling this reading? What comes up for you? Fear, curiosity? Etc. HONOR THIS for yourself and each other.**
6. **Consider opening each meeting with a selected reading by facilitator that is relatable to the readings, such as a reading from Richard Wagamese: EMBERS**
7. **Consider opening each meeting with a “Grounding” exercise.**

**The First Invitation – Don’t Wait- Chapter 1: The Doorway to Possibility**

*Whatever we have done with our lives makes us what we are when we die. And everything, absolutely everything counts.* Sogyal Rinpoche

1. Select 3 statements from Chapter 1 that are pertinent to you. Be prepared to read aloud and to talk about them. What did they provoke or stir in you?
2. Share your thoughts about this statement: Change is constant and inevitable. Explore your relationship to constant change. What is one change you are grateful for? How did it open the door to a new possibility?
3. What fears or anxieties do you have attached to the fear of impermanence and death?

Statements to ponder:

1. Don’t put things off – when people are dying, it is easy for them to recognize that every minute, every breath counts. But the truth is, death is always with us. If we listen closely, the message we hear is: *Don’t wait. Embracing the truth that all things inevitably must end encourages us not to wait in order to begin living each moment in a manner that is deeply engaged. We stop wasting our lives on meaningless activities.* P. 16
  2. Reflecting on our own mortality: Death is the elephant in the room. P. 17
  3. We set ourselves up for great disappointment when we cling, hoping that things will never change. P. 18
  4. While we mostly associate impermanence with sadness and endings, it is not all about loss. In Buddhism, impermanence is often referred to as the “Law of Change and Becoming.” Just as there is constant “dissolving,” there is also constant “becoming.” P. 20
  5. The river of yesterday is not the same as the river of today. It is like the sages say: “We can’t step into the same river twice.”
  6. We can’t create conditions that are capable of providing enduring happiness that is resistant to change. P. 22
-

## **Week 2: Continue with the First Invitation – “Don’t Wait”**

Read chapters 2, 3, & 4 – through page 72

### Questions to prepare for prior to meeting:

1. Pick one or two statements that have meaning to you. Read aloud and share your thoughts about these.
2. What are you waiting to say, do or be in your life? Pick one and share honestly.
3. Hope is an innate human quality that can positively contribute to a sense of wellness. Mature hope requires both a clear intention and a simultaneous letting go. How can you be open to outcome without being attached to a specific result?
4. Forgiveness has many benefits. The author suggests that it’s like setting down a hot coal we have been carrying in our hand. What have been the obstacles to forgiveness in your life?

### **Welcome**

*“And I was some of the mud that got to sit up and look around. Lucky me, lucky mud.” P. 30  
KVonnegut.*

*“Be aware of the Great Matter of Birth and Death*

*Life passes swiftly,*

*Wake up, Wake up!*

*Do not waste this life. P 39*

*“Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” Desmond Tutu*

### **Tackle questions**

#### **Chapter 2: At once here and disappearing**

#### Statements to Ponder

1. Sometimes the only thing left in the room is breath. Death is much like birth in that way, with everyone’s attention naturally focused on the simplicity of breath. P. 31
2. The “self” is (always) dissolving. This is happening all the time: we just see it at the surface at the time of dying. Now, who are you? P. 32
3. When we relax the clinging to our treasured beliefs and ideas, soften our resistance to the blows of life, stop trying to manage the uncertainty and hold ourselves more lightly, then we become a less solid thing. Less of a fixed identity. P. 39
4. As I accepted the fragility of my life, it opened me. I felt myself to be a porous thing, more transparent, more permeable. P. 39
5. Embracing our own impermanence is a journey, taking us deeper and deeper into contact with the true nature of things. First we accept that things around us change. Then we

realize that we, ourselves, are ever changing: our thoughts and feelings, our attitudes and beliefs, even our identities. P. 42

### **Chapter 3: The Maturation of Hope**

Statements to Ponder:

1. Hope is a subtle, sometimes unconscious attitude of heart and mind that is an essential resource in this human life. P. 44
2. The energizing quality of mature hope helps us to remain open to the possibility that while life may not turn out the way we first thought, opportunities we never imagined may also arise. P. 47
3. Most of us choose comfort over truth. But when you think about it, we don't grow and transform in our comfort zones. We grow when we realize we are no longer able to control all of the conditions of our lives, and are therefore challenged to change our selves. When we release our clinging to what used to be and our craving for what we think should be, we are free to embrace the truth of what is in this moment. P. 48
4. The present moment includes all time; it is the all-inclusive now. The present moment could best be described as the flow of life. We are continually being shaped by it, and we are shaping it through the way we meet and respond to it. P 53
5. Detachment vs. non-attachment and don't wait and non-waiting p. 54-55

### **Chapter 4: "The Heart of the Matter"**

Statements to Ponder:

1. Loving and letting go are inseparable. You can't love and cling at the same time. Too often we mistake attachment for love. P 59
  2. Forgiveness does not ask us to welcome people back into our lives. We can still say to our abuser, "No, I don't ever want to see you again." But forgiveness empowers us to let ourselves off the hook: "I don't need to continue to carry all this tightness, rage, anger, and pain within me." P.69
  3. Don't wait until you find yourself on your deathbed to begin the process of forgiving those who have hurt you or those you have wronged. Allow the fragile nature of life to show you what's most important...then take action. It hurts too much to keep others or ourselves out of our hearts.
-

### **Week 3: The Second Invitation – “Welcome Everything, Push Away Nothing”**

Read Chapters 5, 6, & 7 through page 114

Questions to prepare for prior to the meeting:

1. What are you pushing away at this moment in your life? What are you not allowing in? What nightmare are you trying to avoid?
2. Pain + Resistance = Suffering. What is an example in your life where you push away your pain, whether it is physical or emotional, and as a result cause yourself more suffering?
3. As people come closer to death, there are 2 questions: “Am I loved?” and “Did I love well?” How might you respond to those questions today?

#### **Welcome**

*“To Welcome Everything is an act of love”*

*“Life begins with love, is maintained with love, and ends with love.”*

#### **Tackle questions**

##### **Chapter 5: “As Is”**

Statements to ponder:

1. Welcome everything, push away nothing is first and foremost an invitation to openness. In the Buddhist way of thinking, openness is one of the key characteristic of an awake and curious mind. It does not determine reality, it discovers it. P. 79
2. Openness doesn't reject or get attached to a particular experience or view. It is a spacious, undefended, non-biased allowing. A total acceptance. It means welcoming the bad times and the good times as equally valid experiences. P. 80
3. Welcome everything, push away nothing is the opposite of rejecting. Denial breeds ignorance and fear. I cannot be free if I am rejecting any part of my experience. The rejected experience will keep showing up like a bad penny. P. 80
4. Welcome everything, push away nothing is neither a foolish nor an idealistic invitation. On the contrary, it is eminently practical. Accepting life as is means that we make peace with things as they are rather than trying to force them to be the way we want them to be. P.85

##### **Chapter 6: “Turn toward your suffering”**

Statements to ponder:

1. Suffering will only be removed by wisdom, not by drenching it in sunshine or attempting to bury it in a dark basement. P. 88

2. The first step is to realize that pain and suffering are two intimately related yet different experiences. The familiar adage says, "Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional." P. 90
3. When we get caught in anxiety and worry about what might happen in the future, it can quickly proliferate into a web of fear that is not easily corralled. P. 91
4. Turning toward our suffering may plunge us into the very sadness, fear, and pain that we usually try so hard to avoid. But if we are willing to brave the darkness be welcoming everything and pushing away nothing, the energy that had been consumed by our resistance to life's unwelcome events will now be available to contribute to healing, building resilience, and acting with love. P. 97

### **Chapter 7: "Love Heals"**

Statements to Ponder:

1. We do not need to go out and find love; rather, we need to be still and let love discover us. P. 104
  2. If love is bountiful and endless, why then do we get caught up in scarcity, feeling that we must hold onto our beloveds so tightly? In part, it is because we confuse love and attachment. Attachment likes to impersonate love. P. 111
-

## **Week 4: The Third Invitation: Bring Your Whole Self to the Experience**

Read chapters 8, 9, 10, & 11. Read through page 180

Questions to prepare for prior to the meeting:

1. When we over-identify with a role, it defines us, confines us, and reduces our capacity for conscious choice. It sets up an expectation about how life is supposed to proceed. What roles do you still carry that you no longer need?
2. When you were a child and an adult criticized you how did you respond? Did you withdraw, collapse, or silence yourself? Did you try to please and accommodate, negotiate, persuade, or explain? Did you rebel, talk back, act with hostility? How do you continue these strategies in dealing with your inner critic today? Do they work?
3. To accompany a dying person or to make the journey through grief ourselves may be the greatest challenge we will ever face in our lives. When dealing with the grief of others or your own, how have you incorporated ritual into these experiences? Do you bury your grief, or have you been able to bring it out in the open and look at it straight on?

### **Welcome**

*“Watching the moon at dawn, solitary, mid-sky, I knew myself completely: no part left out.”*

*“To be whole, we need to include, accept, and connect all parts of ourselves.”*

*“Authenticity requires trust in a deep inner wisdom and the willingness to bring that wisdom into conscious action.”*

*“It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.”*

***Check-in: We are about half-way through the book. How are you feeling? Are you comfortable with the readings? Curious, scared?***

**Tackle above questions.**

### **Chapter 8: Don't be a role, be a soul**

Statements to ponder:

1. It's common and perfectly natural when caught up in the grips of fear to become defensive, controlling, emotionally unavailable and irritable, and to lose patience with ourselves and others. We want to feel safe, so we cling to roles with their established rules and prescriptive behaviors. P. 119
2. Roles are neither good nor bad. They are primarily functional and provide for some needed predictability in our lives, especially when it comes to interpersonal relationships. P. 119;
3. Roles are a choice. When we choose to be in one role, we also choose not to be in another. P. 120

4. We are first and foremost human beings, with all of the complexity, fragility, and wonder that life encompasses. When we only look through the lens of a role, it narrows our vision of the world. We don't see things and people as they actually are, but rather project our story onto them. P. 121

I don't heal because my problems are being solved. I heal by reconnecting with what I feel I lost in the fear and contraction. I heal by connecting to my innate capacity to heal. This is felt as loving self-acceptance, a quality of openness to my condition that is expanded and strengthened through the dynamic companionship of compassion. It breeds courage and allows us to go forward and learn from the suffering. P. 127

### **Chapter 9: Taming the Inner Critic**

Statements to ponder:

1. We need to see how the habit of constant self-judgment diminishes our life force. Steals our inner peace, and crushes our soul. P. 135
2. Discernment (vs. self-judgment) makes space, helps us to have perspective, and allows more of our humanity to show up. Discernment helps wisdom to emerge and enables us to choose a more beneficial future. Our innate discriminating wisdom is a kind, more objective voice that is available to all of us. It can differentiate, discern, and intelligently guide us forward. P. 139

### **Chapter 10: The Raging River (handling grief)**

Statements to ponder:

1. We generally have two options with difficult emotions: *repress or express*. We repress because an experience seems threatening, upsetting, or somehow inappropriate. Repression can be a choice to defend against, as when we become conscious of a feeling or an experience and then push it below the surface of our awareness. When we repress an experience it does not go away. It still lurks below the surface, encapsulated in its original form with all its associated energy. Emotional expression can be positive and healthy. Sharing our stories is often how we discover the meaning and value of a particular experience. P 151-2.
2. There is a third option: *contain* the emotion. This is a more balanced and creative response. We hold the emotions and the related material in a caring way. p. 152
3. Grief is a normal, natural response to loss. It is also natural to want to avoid it completely. P. 153
4. Grief is like a stream running through our lives, and it is important to understand that loss doesn't go away. It lasts a lifetime. ....there is no right way to grieve, no timetable, no one path. And there certainly are no shortcuts through grief. The only way is straight through the middle. P. 153

**Chapter 11: "Hearing the Cries of the World"**

Statements to ponder:

1. The wisdom that gives rise to compassion is the clear understanding of our interdependence, an appreciation that we are not separate. P. 167
  2. When our nonjudgmental attention responds to exactly what hurts in another, the heart opens. It feels cared for and seen. P. 173
  3. When compassion is truly present, a great deal of pain and suffering is likely to show up in response. That is because the pain wants to expose itself to the healing agent of loving kindness. P. 175
  4. We may believe that we are not up to the task of meeting the suffering of the world. It can be helpful to consider the possibility that compassion is not a quality that we possess, but rather one that we access, inherent in the nature of reality. Love has been here all along. P. 176
-

## **The Fourth Invitation: Find a Place of Rest in the Middle of Things**

Read chapters 12, 13, & 14. Read through page 231

Questions to prepare for prior to the meeting:

1. Share a moment when you have felt calmness in the midst of chaos.
2. Discuss a time when you had the courage to share your vulnerability.
3. Do we need to die before we can rest in peace?
4. How do you find “rest in the middle of things?”
5. Share how you incorporate mindfulness into your everyday activities and how this might be tied into your spiritual practice.
6. Share a time when you provided *Courageous Presence*

### **Welcome**

*“Here and now is the only place of rest.”*

*“Rest is the conversation between what we love to do and how we love to be.”*

*“Mind the gap. The sacred can be found in the ordinary. Rest can be found in the middle of things.”*

**Check-in: How are you feeling? Are you comfortable with the readings?**

**Tackle above questions.**

### **Chapter 12: “The Calm in the Storm”**

Statements to ponder:

1. In truth, many of us fear rest. Doctors and nurses often speak of how exhaustion is a central part of their training and how they continue to drive themselves ruthlessly at work. They fear that if they were to stop racing around the enormous suffering they have witnessed would crash through their defenses. Tears would flow, and they would be unable to stop crying. P. 185
2. We are afraid that we will be forgotten, that if we stop going all the time, the loneliness and emptiness we fear will surface. So we build a false sense of security, warding off uncertainty by making a fetish of constant activity.
3. Rest is found when we are present instead of letting our minds wander aimlessly through the hallways of fear, worry, and anxiousness. P. 185
4. When we lose touch with the rhythms of nature, we become imbalanced. To be fully present within our nature, we must be in balance with the land around us. P. 186

### **Chapter 13: Mind the Gap**

Statements to ponder:

1. We are always messing with ourselves. We tell ourselves what we should be experiencing and what we shouldn't. We work hard to define ourselves, hoping that we are doing it in the right way. This constant activity is totally exhausting. Personal development easily becomes endless and effortful. We try...to be better, to be someone special. There is a certain aggression in all this so-called self-improvement. Better to return to the true intention of meditation, which is to let go of the striving, to embrace things as they are, and with equanimity, to discover freedom. P. 207
2. We have to be willing to meet our suffering, to uncover the hidden shadows, to acknowledge our neurotic patterns, to heal childhood wounds, and to embrace what we have rejected. P. 212

### **Chapter 14: Courageous Presence**

Statements to ponder:

1. We tend to like simple causes: they tidy up life's uncertainties. We want such accidents to be brought under human control. We want someone to be held responsible. We want the outrageous and impossible to be understood, so as to alleviate our sense of helplessness. But life does not always present itself in ways that are right or reasonable. The truth is, we are rarely in control of such catastrophes, of the twists and turns of fate, and most especially not of our deaths. P. 217
  2. The willingness to sit with fear is an act of courage. P. 219
  3. The goal is not to one day get rid of all fear. It is rather to free ourselves from fear's choke hold around our lives, to learn to face our fear with courageous presence. P. 221
  4. Fearlessness is not about eliminating, ignoring, or pushing fear away; it is about developing a capacity to be courageously present with our powerful states of mind and heart even when facing terror. P. 225
-

## **The Fifth Invitation: Cultivate Don't Know Mind**

Read chapters 15, 16, & 17. Read through page 276

Questions to prepare for prior to the meeting:

1. Most of us are strongly identified with our rational-thinking minds. The idea of losing control may be frightening. How do you feel when you forget the name of a place or a person?
2. Not knowing is a gateway to a deeper appreciation of the potency of our basic nature, which cannot be known by the conceptual mind alone. Share a time when you instinctively understood something, or what to do, without figuring it out.
3. Surrender happens when we stop fighting. We stop fighting ourselves. We stop fighting with life. Surrender is a state in which resistance of any kind ceases to occur. We no longer put up any defense. Describe a positive experience of surrender in your life.
4. Share a time when you experienced deep silence and tapped into the sacred.

### **Welcome**

*"A mind is like a parachute. It doesn't work if it is not open.."*

*"The wise person is both compassionate and humble and knows that she does not know."*

*"Wisdom tells me I am nothing. Love tells me I am everything. Between the two, life flows."*

*"Now is the season to know that everything you do is sacred."*

**Check-in: As we finish the Fifth Invitation – how are you feeling? What emotions arise for you?**

**Tackle above questions.**

### **Chapter 15: The Story of Forgetfulness**

Statements to Ponder:

1. Our memories are constantly being rewritten. Memory fails. This is part of the process of being alive. Best, then, to focus on remembering what matters most. Not the details of dates or conversations, but that we are loved and that we are capable of loving others. When there is full acceptance of our not knowing, instead of fear, when we stop insisting that reality should be otherwise, then we can relax with things as they are. P. 243
2. We are not just what we think, what we say, or what we do and certainly not just what we remember. Those experiences don't define all that we are. Who we are is bigger than that. Awareness, or capacity to witness experience, is not just a cognitive function. Awareness is beyond thought, beyond feeling, beyond action. P. 250

**Chapter 16: Not Knowing is Most Intimate**

Statements to Ponder:

1. Not knowing is a gateway to a deeper appreciation of the potency of our basic nature, which cannot be known by the conceptual mind alone. It takes us beyond our ordinary way of thinking and seeing things, and into intimacy with this very moment. P. 256
2. Reality cannot be mapped. It is beyond description or any one view. It is not a single static truth, but rather an endless, unfolding mystery. It is alive, dynamic, and constantly being expressed through form and formlessness. P. 257
3. We exist, and then we don't. Each life, each occurrence, each feeling, every lovemaking, every breakfast, every atom, every planet, every solar system is fleeting. Every form takes its turn on the wheel of living and dying. P. 258

**Chapter 17: Surrender to the Sacred**

Statements to ponder:

1. To know the sacred is not to see new things, but rather to see things in a new way. The sacred is not separate or different from all things; it is hidden in all things. And dying is an opportunity to uncover what is hidden. P. 264
  2. Deep silence is not merely a pause between sounds. It is an inner quietness felt in the heart, still as new-fallen snow on a mountain pass. This silence strips us of both belief and disbelief. It takes us beyond the known, beyond language, and into the sacred. P. 267
  3. For some, death is full of tragedy. But for others, dying is a time of spiritual transformation that takes them beyond personal identity, bringing forward a sense of absolute safety, fearlessness, and even perfection in the face of the unknown. In the dying process, many ordinary people come to know themselves as what I can only call "an undying love." P. 268
-

## **Epilogue: Dying Into Life – Read to end of book**

Questions to prepare for the meeting:

1. There's an old tradition in Japan of Zen monks and others writing short death poems. They often express an essential truth discovered in one's life. If you can, take a moment to write a four-line poem.

### **Welcome**

*The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.  
Don't go back to sleep.  
You must ask for what you really want.  
Don't go back to sleep.  
People are going back and forth across the doorsill  
Where the two worlds touch.  
This door is round and open.  
Don't go back to sleep. Rumi*

**Check-in: As we finish the Book – how are you feeling? What emotions arise for you?**

**Tackle above questions.**

Statements to ponder:

1. The transformation of consciousness, which is possible for each of us in our day-to-day lives, requires our active engagement. We cannot think our way through it. It is not a strategic plan that we execute. Transformation requires an open-ended willingness to be fully vulnerable to the experience of the unknown.
2. The contemplation of life, death, and the inherent mystery in each moment is too important to be left to our final hours. Coming to terms with our fears and discovering what dying has to teach us about life are essential to our transformation.

What's next?