I read the book in April 2018. It tells benefits of meditations and such practices from a once skeptic perspective. There are interviews with Eckhart Tolle, Deepak Chopra and Dalai Lama, and Mark Epstein, whom the author likes most (as the most sensible.) Overall it's a nice and sincere introduction to Buddhist-living in a modern world with daily responsibilities and a highly competitive job.

page 4

Once you get the hang of it, the practice can create just enough space in your head so that when you get angry or annoyed, you are less likely to take the bait and act on it. There's even science to back this up—an explosion of new research, complete with colorful MRI scans, demonstrating that meditation can essentially rewire your brain. This science challenges the common assumption that our levels of happiness, resilience, and kindness are set from birth. Many of us labor under the delusion that we're permanently stuck with all of the difficult parts of our personalities—that we are "hot-tempered," or "shy," or "sad"—and that these are fixed, immutable traits. We now know that many of the attributes we value most are, in fact, skills, which can be trained the same way you build your body in the gym.

page 5

I discovered, this new neuroscience has led to the flowering of an elite subculture of executives, athletes, and marines who are using meditation to improve their focus, curb their addiction to technology, and stop being yanked around by their emotions.

page 5

If I quiet the voice in my head, will I lose my edge? Some think they need depression to be creative or compulsive worry to be successful.

page 14

The other running joke was that I had inherited all of my dad's worrier genes, and my brother had been spared. As Matt once quipped, "Dan makes Woody Allen look like a Buddhist monk."

page 27

With coke, you never reach satiety. It hits, it peaks, it fades—and before you know it, every cell in your body is screaming for more. It's like that line from the poet Rilke, who referred to the "quick gain of an approaching loss." I chased this dragon with the zeal of the convert.

page 27

The lesson for the neophyte drug taker was that there is no free lunch, neurologically speaking. On the day after ecstasy, my serotonin stores would be utterly depleted. I often found myself overwhelmed by a soul-sucking sense of emptiness, a hollowed-out husk of a man.

page 62

Tolle began to unfurl a fascinating thesis, one that made me think he must have somehow spent an enormous amount of time inside my skull. Our entire lives, he argued, are governed by a voice in our heads. This voice is engaged in a ceaseless stream of thinking—most of it negative, repetitive, and self-referential. It squawks away at us from the minute we open our eyes in the morning until the minute we fall asleep at night, if it allows us to sleep at all. Talk, talk, talk: the voice is constantly judging and labeling everything in its field of vision.

page 67

A New Earth, came out, Oprah put on an unprecedented, eleven-part "webinar." Millions of people tuned in to watch her and Tolle sit at a desk, deconstructing the book, chapter by chapter. Their personal styles were almost comically mismatched: Oprah would whoop and holler as Tolle looked on placidly; Tolle would prattle on about "energy fields" as Oprah mmmed and aahed credulously.

page 68

But then a funny thing happened. After all my reading about the empty nattering of the ego, I realized: These fearful forecasts were just thoughts skittering through my head. They weren't irrational, but they weren't necessarily true.

page 70

How do we do a better job of staying in the Now? Tolle's answer: "Always say 'yes' to the present moment." How do we achieve liberation from the voice in the head? His advice: simply be aware of it. "To become free of the ego is not really a big job but a very small one." Yes, right. Easy. But if it were this uncomplicated, wouldn't there be millions of awakened people walking around?

page 72

"How on earth do you stop thinking?" I began. "How do you stop the voice in your head?" I had a momentary surge of optimism as he shifted in his chair in clear preparation to give the practical advice I'd been yearning for. "You create little spaces in your daily life where you are aware but not thinking," he said. "For example, you take one conscious breath."

page 76

Was it really possible to defeat the gray Stalinism of self-absorption without ending up on a park bench? I was not about to let this drop. It was as if I'd met a man who'd told me my hair was on fire, and then refused to offer me a fire extinguisher.

page 78

Right off the bat, Chopra dismissed Tolle as "not a very good writer." (Apparently self-help gurus talk smack about one another, just as some evangelicals do, I realized.)

page 79

When you're totally present, whatever the situation is, good or bad, it's gonna pass. The only thing that remains is the moment. It's the transformational vortex to the infinite." Apparently when one lives in the moment, one becomes unafraid of using terms like "transformational vortex to the infinite."

page 84

On many levels, Deepak seemed like a walking contradiction. He claimed to be perennially present, and yet we filmed him pounding down the street while furiously typing on his BlackBerry, and then voraciously devouring articles on his Kindle while ostensibly working out on an elliptical machine.

page 84

He claimed to live in a state of "flow" and "effortless spontaneity," but he seemed pretty focused on mundane self-promotion to me. While publicizing his latest book, he lobbied a reporter to follow him on Twitter, and when shooting a promotional video, he told the cameraman, "Make sure I don't look fat." These didn't strike me as the actions of a man living in perfect harmony with himself; this was the type of shit I did.

page 85

He quit his day job and went to work for the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the bearded Indian holy man perhaps most famous for his stint as the official guru of the Beatles. (After a brief stay at his ashram, John Lennon left in a huff over allegations that the Maharishi had tried to fondle Mia Farrow. On his way back to London, Lennon wrote the song “Sexy Sadie,” featuring the lyric, “What have you done? You’ve made a fool of everyone.”) Deepak climbed to the rank of the Maharishi’s top lieutenant.

page 86

His memorable assertions to me included “The universe is a nanotechnology workshop in the mind of god,” and “Don’t call it God, call it a-causal, non-local, quantum-mechanical inter-religiousness.”

page 86

Eckhart was befuddling because, while I believed he was sincere, I couldn’t tell if he was sane. With Deepak it was the opposite; I believed he was sane, but I couldn’t tell if he was sincere.

page 88

Homeless just thirty years ago, Vitale had earned his PhD in “metaphysics” through a correspondence course from the University of Sedona.

page 90

Sedona, a city known as the New Age Vatican, set amid dramatic red rock cliffs, was a mecca for spiritual tourists who were catered to by a legion of self-proclaimed healers, mystics, wind whisperers, and intuitive counselors who offered such services as “soul-retrieval,” “energy healing,” and “aura photos.”

page 92

About ten years prior, she had read some books by Epstein who, she explained, was a psychiatrist and a practicing Buddhist.

page 93

The best parts of Tolle were largely unattributed Buddhism. Tolle had not, as I'd assumed when I'd first read A New Earth, made up his insights out of whole cloth.

page 94

The word Buddhism was actually an invention of the nineteenth-century Western scholars who discovered and translated the original texts. As best I could tell, the whole thing appeared to be less a faith than a philosophy, and one that had been intriguing psychologists since the days of Freud, when his early Viennese followers studied those newly translated texts.

page 97

If there was no such thing as security, then why bother with the insecurity?

page 98

Wasn't the Buddhist emphasis on "letting go" a recipe for passivity? Was the denigration of desire another way of saying we shouldn't bother to strive?

page 101

It hit me that what I had on my hands here was a previously undiscovered species: a normal human being. Epstein, it appeared to me, was the anti-Tolle, the anti-Chopra.

page 102

[I]t was impossible not to notice that nearly all of these names were Jewish: Goldstein, Goleman, Kornfield, Salzberg. "This is a whole subculture," he said. The little cabal even had a nickname: the "Jew-Bus."

page 103

Mark theorized that many of these young Jewish people, having been raised in secular environments, felt a spiritual hole in their lives. He also acknowledged that the Jewish penchant for anxiety probably

played a role in their collective attraction to Buddhism. Over the ensuing decades, the Jew-Bus had been a major force in figuring out how to translate the wisdom of the East for a Western audience—mostly by making it less hierarchical and devotional.

page 107

1. Sit comfortably. You don't have to be cross-legged. Plop yourself in a chair, on a cushion, on the floor—wherever. Just make sure your spine is reasonably straight.
2. Feel the sensations of your breath as it goes in and out. Pick a spot: nostrils, chest, or gut. Focus your attention there and really try to feel the breath. If it helps to direct your attention, you can use a soft mental note, like "in" and "out."
3. This one, according to all of the books I'd read, was the biggie. Whenever your attention wanders, just forgive yourself and gently come back to the breath. You don't need to clear the mind of all thinking; that's pretty much impossible. (True, when you are focused on the feeling of the breath, the chatter will momentarily cease, but this won't last too long.) The whole game is to catch your mind wandering and then come back to the breath, over and over again.

page 108

It didn't get any easier. Almost immediately upon sitting down, I'd be beset by itches. Then there was the fatigue: a thick ooze, a sludgelike torpor sliding down my forehead. Even when the itches and fatigue lifted, I was left contending with the unstoppable fire hose of thoughts.

page 111

Buddhism's secret sauce went by a hopelessly anodyne name: "mindfulness." In a nutshell, mindfulness is the ability to recognize what is happening in your mind right now—anger, jealousy, sadness, the pain of a stubbed toe, whatever—without getting carried away by it. According to the Buddha, we have three habitual responses to everything we experience. We want it, reject it, or we zone out. Cookies: I want. Mosquitoes: I reject. The safety instructions the flight attendants read aloud on an airplane: I zone out. Mindfulness is a fourth option, a way to view the contents of our mind with nonjudgmental remove. I found this theory elegant, but utterly unfeasible.

page 113

The Buddhists had a helpful analogy here. Picture the mind like a waterfall, they said: the water is the torrent of thoughts and emotions; mindfulness is the space behind the waterfall.

page 125

This time, the debate would be between Chopra and his longtime nemesis, Michael Shermer, a former fundamentalist Christian turned militant atheist and professional debunker of pseudoscience.

page 125

[S]ince Deepak didn't believe in what he called the "dead white man" God of the Bible, but rather in an indescribable intelligence at the heart of the universe, a view he believed science could support.

page 129

Silence, however, is the part that worries me the least. I don't imagine there will be many people at the retreat I'll be dying to chat with. What truly scares me is the pain and boredom of sitting and meditating all day every day for ten straight days.

page 133

(I've read that there's such a thing as a "yogi crush," a silent longing for one of your fellow meditators, at whom you steal furtive glances and around whom you construct feverish fantasies. As I look around the room, I realize this will not be a problem for me.)

page 134

In the first part of the chant, we're "taking refuge" in the Buddha, "the Blessed One, the Perfected One, the Fully Enlightened One." Then we take the "precepts," which are basically a series of promises: no harming (people or animals), no stealing, no lying, no substance abuse—and also, as if this might be a problem, "no dancing, singing, music, and unseemly shows." If my friends could see me perched on this tuffet, chanting, they would be laughing their asses off.

page 135

While the word yogi sounds goofy—like Yogi Berra or Yogi Bear—these people all seem so grim. Turns out, mindfulness isn't such a cute look. Everyone is in his or her own world, trying very hard to stay in the moment.

page 136

During the first period of walking meditation, I'm at a loss. I have no idea what walking meditation even means, so I decide to just take a stroll. There are lots of animals here: salamanders, baby deer, wild turkeys. They come right up to you, totally unafraid. Apparently the "commitment to non-harming" memo has reached the woodland creatures. And the humans take it very seriously. Last night, I saw a guy in the meditation hall make a big show out of ushering a bug out of the room on a sheet of paper rather than squashing it. The third sitting is even more of a nightmare.

page 140

He's talking about a verse where the Buddha calls everything we experience—sights, sounds, smells, etc.—the "terrible bait of the world." "It's … an amazing statement," he says. "Moment after moment, experiences are arising, and it's as if each one has a hook … and we're the fish. Do we bite? Or do we not bite, and just swim freely in the ocean?"

page 141

This time, it's the metta chant, where we send "loving-kindness" to a whole series of "beings," including our parents, teachers, and "guardian deities." We wish for everyone to experience the End of Suffering.

page 144

I get that, just like regular meditation is designed to build our mindfulness muscle, metta is supposed to boost our capacity for compassion, but all this exercise is doing for me is generating feelings of boredom, disdain, and insufficiency.

page 145

At the end of one back-and-forth, I look up and see a statue of the Buddha. Silently, I send him the following message: Fuck you.

page 149

I'm remembering that time when my friend Kaiama stumped me by asking how anyone can be in the present moment when it's always slipping away. It's so obvious to me now: the slipping away is the

whole point. Once you've achieved choiceless awareness, you see so clearly how fleeting everything is. Impermanence is no longer theoretical. Tempus fugit isn't just something you inscribe in books and clocks. And that, I realize, is what this retreat is designed to do.

page 152

The Buddha's signature pronouncement—"Life is suffering"—is the source of a major misunderstanding, and by extension, a major PR problem. It makes Buddhism seem supremely dour. Turns out, though, it's all the result of a translation error. The Pali word dukkha doesn't actually mean "suffering." There's no perfect word in English, but it's closer to "unsatisfying" or "stressful." When the Buddha coined his famous phrase, he wasn't saying that all of life is like being chained to a rock and having crows peck out your innards. What he really meant was something like, "Everything in the world is ultimately unsatisfying and unreliable because it won't last."

page 153

There's actually a term for this—"hedonic adaptation." When good things happen, we bake them very quickly into our baseline expectations, and yet the primordial void goes unfilled.

page 157

At the end, the meditator arrives at the true goal of Buddhist meditation: to see that the "self" that we take to be the ridgepole of our lives is actually an illusion. The real superpower of meditation is not just to manage your ego more mindfully but to see that the ego itself has no actual substance. Close your eyes and look for it, and you won't find any "self" you can put your finger on.

page 159

He urges us not to spend too much time thinking about the stuff we have to do when the retreat is over. It's a waste of time, he says; they're just thoughts.

page 159

"But when you find yourself running through your trip to the airport for the seventeenth time, perhaps ask yourself the following question: 'Is this useful'?"

page 159

It's okay to worry, plot, and plan, he's saying—but only until it's not useful anymore.

page 163

The more I meditated, the more I looked around and appreciated that we all have monkey minds—that everyone has their own Weirs and Muirs they're competing against, their own manufactured balding crises (and, of course, the kinds of more serious collisions with impermanence from which I had mercifully been spared thus far).

page 164

It vaguely reminded me of the middling 1990s comedy Crazy People, in which Dudley Moore plays an ad exec who decides to start employing honesty in his taglines, coming up with such gems as "Volvos—Yes they are boxy, but they're safe," and "Jaguar—For men who'd like hand jobs from beautiful women they hardly know." His company sends him to an insane asylum.

page 167

According to the school of Buddhism to which Joseph belonged (there were many, I'd learned), there were four stages of enlightenment. The schema sounded like something out of Dungeons & Dragons. Someone who'd achieved the first stage of enlightenment was a "stream-enterer." This was followed by a "once-returner," a "non-returner," and then a fully enlightened being, known as an "arhant." Each stage had sixteen sublevels.

page 180

My mother—the original skeptic in my life, the debunker of God and Santa Claus—was very impressed by the Harvard study showing gray matter thickening in meditators. After reading about it online, she asked me to give her a meditation guidebook for Christmas. A few weeks later, she sent me an excited email saying that she had read the book and had decided, during a taxi ride to the airport, to give it a try.

page 183

"It's not me telling you," she said. "It's neuroscience that would say that our capacity to multitask is virtually nonexistent. Multitasking is a computer-derived term. We have one processor. We can't do it."

page 183

Another tip: take short mindfulness breaks throughout the day. She called them "purposeful pauses." So, for example, instead of fidgeting or tapping your fingers while your computer boots up, try to watch your breath for a few minutes. When driving, turn off the radio and feel your hands on the wheel. Or when walking between meetings, leave your phone in your pocket and just notice the sensations of your legs moving.

page 183

Marturano recommended something radical: do only one thing at a time. When you're on the phone, be on the phone. When you're in a meeting, be there. Set aside an hour to check your email, and then shut off your computer monitor and focus on the task at hand.

page 190

What I liked about the dharma was its rigorous empiricism and unyielding embrace of hard truths.

page 191

[Dalai Lama] "There's a risk," I said. "What if scientists discover something that contradicts your faith?" "No—no risk. If a scientist confirm nonexistence of something we believe, then we have to accept that." "So if scientists come up with something that contradicts your beliefs, you will change your beliefs?" "Oh yes. Yes." Reassuring answer.

page 192

If someone is never lose temper then perhaps they may come from another space," [Dalai Lama] said, pointing toward the sky and laughing from the belly, his eyes twinkling beneath his thick glasses.

page 192

"So if somebody says to you, 'I never lose my temper,' you don't believe them?" "No. And some people say this is some miracle power—I don't believe." Within minutes, he had already proven himself more reasonable than either Eckhart Tolle or Deepak Chopra.

page 193

"Yes. Practice of compassion is ultimately benefit to you. So I usually describe: we are selfish, but be wise selfish rather than foolish selfish."

page 193

As our crew was packing up to leave, he called me back over one more time and said that if I was really interested in Buddhism, I should read his favorite book, by an ancient sage named Shantideva. The PR people from Emory breathlessly told me this must mean he really liked me. Ultimately, I couldn't get through the book—but that notion about being nice for selfish reasons, that I kept.

page 195

From a traditionalist standpoint, my approach to meditation—and that of most Western practitioners—was backward. In the Buddha's day, he first taught generosity and morality before he gave his followers meditation instructions. The logic was self-interested: it's hard to concentrate if your mind is humming with remorse over having been a shithead, or if you're constantly scrambling to try to keep various lies straight. In his typical OCD fashion, the Buddha even compiled a list of the eleven benefits to practicing metta, which promised that you'd sleep better, your face would be radiant, people and animals would love you, celestial beings would protect you, and you'd be reborn in a happy realm. As usual, the list lost impact for me as it edged toward the supernatural.

page 196

Per Spring's instruction from the retreat, I'd spend the first five or ten minutes of my sessions picturing and sending good vibes out to: myself, a "benefactor" (either Matt, Mark, or my parents), a "dear friend" (my favorite cat, Steve), a "neutral person" (our overnight doorman), a "difficult person" (not a hard category to fill), and then "all living beings" (usually a National Geographic–style tour of the planet).

page 196

Whatever the cause, in the months after I started adding compassion into my meditation practice, things started to change. It's not that I was suddenly a saint or that I began to exhibit extra-virgin extroversion, just that being nice—always important to me in the abstract, at least—now became a conscious, daily priority.

page 197

The Buddha captured it well when he said that anger, which can be so seductive at first, has "a honeyed tip" but a "poisoned root."

page 198

Rather, it was simply that actions have immediate consequences in your mind—which cannot be fooled. Behave poorly, and whether you're fully conscious of it or not, your mind contracts. The great blessing—and, frankly, the great inconvenience—of becoming more mindful and compassionate was that I was infinitely more sensitive to the mental ramifications of even the smallest transgressions, from killing a bug to dropping trash on the street.

page 202

There was a larger issue at play here: Was journalism—or any high-stakes, competitive profession, really—incompatible with metta? My job required me to ask provocative questions, to "go in for the kill," as we say—and, often, that wasn't so nice.

page 206

Sharon happened to give a very timely talk on the subject of mudita, the Buddhist term for sympathetic joy. She admitted that sometimes her first instinct when trying to summon this feeling was "Ew, I wish you didn't have so much going for you."

page 206

"When faced with something like this," she said, "often it's not the unknown that scares us, it's that we think we know what's going to happen—and that it's going to be bad. But the truth is, we really don't know."

page 208

I also thought, with a degree of self-satisfaction, that having a calmer, more compassionate mind was allowing me to take a dry-eyed view of the situation, unclouded by unhelpful emotion. Rather than take it personally, I tried to see it through Ben's eyes. He was just doing the best he could to turn the news division around. Maybe I just wasn't his cup of tea? I comforted myself with the conclusion that I was engaged in a healthy acknowledgment of reality that would ultimately allow for the virtuous cycle of less unnecessary straining and better decision making.

page 210

In mere minutes he had pinpointed and pronounced my errors. Behind the fig leaf of being a good yogi, I had gone so far down the path of resignation and passivity that I had compromised the career I had worked for decades to build.

page 211

The Sufi Muslims say, "Praise Allah, but also tie your camel to the post." In other words, it's good to take a transcendent view of the world, but don't be a chump.

page 215

The upturn began one morning after the show, when Bianca found me sitting on the living room couch, once again watching and puzzling over some on-air moments with which I was dissatisfied. She grabbed the remote out of my hand and spontaneously began an hour-long clinic, starting at the top of the show and deconstructing exactly how and where I went wrong.

page 217

"Yeah," he said, in as snide a tone as he was capable of. "Me and your parents." But it's not the same thing, he explained. You can do your best and then, if things don't go your way, still become unconstructively upset, in a way that hinders your ability to bounce back. Dropping the attachment is the real trick. Then it clicked. Per usual, Mark's advice was sound, even if it took me a while to absorb it. Striving is fine, as long as it's tempered by the realization that, in an entropic universe, the final outcome is out of your control. If you don't waste your energy on variables you cannot influence, you can focus much more effectively on those you can. When you are wisely ambitious, you do everything

you can to succeed, but you are not attached to the outcome—so that if you fail, you will be maximally resilient, able to get up, dust yourself off, and get back in the fray. That, to use a loaded term, is enlightened self-interest.

page 219

Since the Buddhists are always making lists (I was convinced that somewhere they had a list of the Best Ways to Make a List), I resolved to draw up one of my own. Nothing on the list I compiled was, in and of itself, mind-bogglingly brilliant. There's a reason why they call Buddhism "advanced common sense"; it's all about methodically confronting obvious-but-often-overlooked truths (everything changes, nothing fully satisfies) until something in you shifts.

page 219

The Way of the Worrier 1. Don't Be a Jerk 2. (And/But …) When Necessary, Hide the Zen 3. Meditate 4. The Price of Security Is Insecurity—Until It's Not Useful 5. Equanimity Is Not the Enemy of Creativity 6. Don't Force It 7. Humility Prevents Humiliation 8. Go Easy with the Internal Cattle Prod 9. Nonattachment to Results 10. What Matters Most?

page 221

Being happier did not, as many fear, make me a blissed-out zombie. This myth runs deep, all the way back to Aristotle, who said, "All men who have attained excellence in philosophy, in poetry, in art and in politics … had a melancholic habitus." I found that rather than rendering me boringly problem-free, mindfulness made me, as an eminent spiritual teacher once said, "a connoisseur of my neuroses."

page 222

We're all the stars of our own movies, but cutting back on the number of Do you know who I am? thoughts made my life infinitely smoother. When you don't dig in your heels and let your ego get into entrenched positions from which you mount vigorous, often irrational defenses, you can navigate tricky situations in a much more agile way.

page 224

have three significant updates since the end of the last chapter. These include: a flip-flop, a promotion, and I guess what you might call a moment of clarity.

page 226

To make sure I wasn't losing my mind, I called the most skeptical person I knew, Sam Harris. Lo and behold, he, too, said enlightenment was real, although he used a different analogy. Just as it's possible for humans to train to be fast or strong enough to compete in the Olympics, he argued we can practice to be the wisest or most compassionate version of ourselves.

page 229

When the interview got under way, I asked him, "Would you describe your work as dangerous?" "Your job is dangerous," he said. "What if I decided to kill or kidnap you right now?" Awkward silence. I was 97 percent sure the don was kidding, but the remaining 3 percent was enough to throw me into a funny headspace. What followed was what I'm calling, for lack of a better term, a moment of clarity. Again, nothing mystical—just a series of thoughts, realizations, and entreaties that arose in a flash.

page 234

1. Sit comfortably. You don't have to twist yourself into a cross-legged position—unless you want to, of course. You can just sit in a chair. (You can also stand up or lie down, although the latter can sometimes result in an unintentional nap.) Whatever your position, you should keep your spine straight, but don't strain.
2. Feel your breath. Pick a spot: nose, belly, or chest. Really try to feel the in-breath and then the out-breath. 3. This one is the key: Every time you get lost in thought—which you will, thousands of times—gently return to the breath. I cannot stress strongly enough that forgiving yourself and starting over is the whole game. As my friend and meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg has written, "Beginning again and again is the actual practice, not a problem to overcome so that one day we can come to the 'real' meditation."

page 239

This is so unbelievably boring. Boredom: also not a new problem. The advice here is similar to how you should handle pain and fatigue: investigate. What does boredom feel like? How does it manifest in your body? Whatever comes up in your mind can be co-opted and turned into the object of meditation. It's like in judo, where you use the force of your enemy against him.

page 239

I keep trying to feel the breath as it naturally occurs, but every time I focus on it, I involuntarily start to control it, so it feels artificial. Doesn't matter. As Joseph Goldstein says, "This is not a breathing exercise." You don't have to breathe a certain way. If you want, you can even take sharper breaths so that it's easier to feel them. What matters here is the mindfulness, not the breath.

page 240

Body scan

1. Sit, stand, or lie down.
2. Start at one end of your body and work up or down. Bring your attention to your feet, your calves, your knees, your butt, and so on. When you get to your head, what can you feel? Anything? After reaching the top, work your way back down.
3. Every time your mind wanders, gently bring it back.

Walking meditation

1. Stake out a stretch of ground roughly ten yards long. (That's somewhat arbitrary—whatever length you've got will work.)
2. Slowly pace back and forth, noting: lift, move, place with every stride. Try your best to feel each component of every stride. (Don't look at your feet, just look at a neutral point in the distance.)
3. Every time your mind wanders, gently bring it back.
4. There is a temptation to denigrate walking meditation as less serious or rigorous than seated meditation, but this is wrong. Just because your legs are crossed doesn't mean you're meditating more effectively. As a noted teacher once said, "I've seen chickens sitting on their eggs for days on end."

page 240

Compassion meditation (aka metta)

At first blush, most rational people find the below off-putting in the extreme. Trust me—or, better, trust the scientists—it works.

1. This practice involves picturing a series of people and sending them good vibes. Start with yourself. Generate as clear a mental image as possible.
2. Repeat the following phrases: May you be happy, May you be healthy, May you be safe, May you live with ease. Do this slowly. Let the sentiment land. You are not forcing your well-wishes on anyone; you're just offering them up, just as you would a cool drink. Also, success is not measured by whether you generate any specific emotion. As Sharon says, you don't need to feel "a surge of sentimental love accompanied by chirping birds." The point is to try. Every time you do, you are exercising your compassion muscle. (By the way, if you don't like the phrases above, you can make up your own.)
3. After you've sent the phrases to yourself, move on to: a benefactor (a teacher, mentor, relative), a close friend (can be a pet, too), a neutral person (someone you see often but don't really ever notice), a difficult person, and, finally, "all beings."

page 241

Open awareness

1. Sit, stand, or lie down. (You can actually do open awareness while walking, too.)
2. Instead of simply watching the breath, try to watch everything that arises. Set up a spy cam in your mind and just see what is there to see. To maintain your focus, try noting whatever comes up: burning, hearing, itching, breathing, etc.
3. Every time you lose your focus, just forgive yourself and come back. (It's pretty easy to get distracted doing this type of meditation, so you might want to use your breath as an anchor that you return to when you get scattered. It's like filling up the hot-air balloon of the mind with enough concentration so that you can fly.)

page 242

TM involves a mantra—a word or a phrase that you repeat silently to yourself. It's a style of meditation that comes out of Hinduism and is focused mainly on generating a deep sense of concentration, which can feel terrific. The practices we're discussing here come out of Buddhism and are focused more on developing mindfulness. (The dividing lines aren't so neat. You definitely build up concentration in Buddhist meditation, and you can also develop some mindfulness in TM.) The two schools tend to look down their noses at each other. However, even though I'm in the Buddhist camp, I've done enough poking around in the TM world to be convinced the practice has plenty of benefits.

page 243

Before he became Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger specifically slammed Buddhism as an “auto-erotic spirituality.”