

Session Six:

# Venturing

If we don't keep taking risks, life can become incredibly dull and depressing. Exploring new realms, whether in the outer or the inner world, gives our life relish and zest. Venturing requires us to take risks.

Do you remember a time you took a risk—maybe something that seemed to be easy for others, but for you was quite an adventure? Can you remember how it felt, in your body and in your spirit, to take that risk?

No one can judge what constitutes “risk” for anyone else. One person may feel enjoyably challenged by climbing a perilous mountain, another by entering a social hall full of people. Someone who feels quite comfortable rafting in white water

may be terrified of sitting in silent meditation for an hour. And someone who thinks nothing of speaking before a large group may be afraid of telling a painful truth to a close relative.

So when you decide to venture forth, whether inward or outward, to challenge yourself and take a risk, I encourage you to choose your own path, take your own risk, absolutely independently of what anyone else might consider worthy or desirable.

Risking not only makes us grow, it is exhilarating—and the joyfulness that comes from risk has an amazingly long staying power. Probably has something to do with endorphins.

For years, I have been wanting to try roller-skating. There's a rink right in my neighborhood, but I could never seem to get there. But when I was preparing to teach a Joyfulness class, I realized that to authentically challenge others to take risks, I'd have to take a risk myself.

As the time approached to go to my beginners' skating lesson, gravity seemed to increase in my immediate locale, and I started thinking up really good reasons not to go. Luckily, I had recruited a friend to drag me along in case of such resistance. He had to practically push me through the entrance of the rink. But before long, there I was, with the seven-year-olds, learning how to skate. The lesson, and the free skating time afterwards, took about an hour and cost ten bucks. For two entire days afterwards, I felt exhilarated—physically renewed, bubbly, enspirited—not merely from the skating, but from the joy of overcoming my own resistance.

Not all risks are successful. A friend of mine went to Italy alone, with no particular agenda or plan, and had a terrible time. But now she knows she can survive far from home in a country where she doesn't speak the language well. Far from discouraging her from travel, the difficult trip to Italy

taught her what works for her and what doesn't. She has since taken several trips alone— but with structured experiences built in—and had a great time.

Nothing creative or worthwhile ever happens—in relationships, spiritual life, art, business, or justice-making— unless someone decides to take a risk and venture out past the known boundaries. Blessings, and congratulations, on your decision to take a risk. Few things are more rewarding.

## Questions for Yourself

Is there anything that both scares and attracts you? How close could you get to it?

When have you taken a risk that paid off? When have you taken a risk that was disastrous?

## Meditation for Venturing

I'm breathing in the color violet, that pale sunset color, pink and blue mixed delicately together...imagining a lovely big blanket of that color, and pulling it gently around me, snug and safe and cozy.

In this safe place, I'm letting myself entertain whatever ideas float into my mind—adventures, risks that I might wish to take. I'm letting each one float before my mind's eye...simply watching them, like a movie.

One or more might have a special glow to them, an aura that asks me to look more closely. With this violet blanket of safety wrapped around me, I let myself look and imagine what this adventure might be like for me.

Without judging or rejecting, I let myself experience whatever feelings come up—yearning, excitement, fear, anticipation...

Returning to the present moment, I sit for a moment with what I have let myself imagine—knowing that I can return and do this meditation whenever I wish.

## Journaling

Keep a list of adventures and risks, both large and small, you might like to take. When you're ready, choose one or two that have the most energy for you, and make a note of the very first, smallest step that you might take in the direction of that adventure.

## Joyfulness Snack 7:

### Your Dreams

*I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.*

—Henry David Thoreau, from *Walden*

## Joyfulness Games to Try:

### Venturing

• Imagine you are very, very old, still hale and hearty, full of vim and vigor and wisdom, full of happy memories about a lifetime full of rich experiences, and looking forward to more. You have access to a magical mailbox that will enable you to write a note back to your current-age self. Remembering some of the adventures and joyful experiences you've had in the past few decades, write a note to your current-age self with advice about how to achieve a joyful life, with a special focus on risks and adventures you should take.

- Do you have a hero—someone whose exploits you admire tremendously? What is the essence of his/her heroism? Is there some way that you can try that on for size? For instance, if you admire a brilliant screenwriter, can you take the risk of writing a short script yourself, finding a writing coach or class to help you get started, or reading a book about screenwriting? Or if you admire someone who made a great impact in the field of social justice, can you research the organizations in your area that are working on the same goals, and see what would be involved in joining one of them?
- Is there something you have always wanted to do? Something adventurous—or even something that other people might think quite mundane, but for you is a huge challenge? Put in writing what it is you'd like to try. And also write down all the things you're afraid of in connection with that goal. Then write down some strategies, and choose the smallest task—reading a book on the topic, researching the trip, learning more about the mountain you want to climb or the person you'd like to ask out. Commit to the goal and take the risk—but make sure it's *your* timetable, *your* goal, *your* risk. And when you've done it, celebrate. Honor yourself for the risk you've taken and the rewards you've experienced. If it was a total flop, celebrate anyway.
- Choose a relational goal—something that will move you into right relationship with a person or group. Strategize on paper. Honor the risk you want to take, by being serious about it and taking the first step.
- Choose an inner goal—an intention to meditate or pray more regularly, or change some destructive habit. Visualize as clearly as possible what it would feel like to accomplish this goal or start this practice. Allow yourself to *want* to move toward it. Start.

- Choose an outer goal—some active challenge in nature, sport, the physical or social world—that you would find particularly rewarding. Problem-solve around all the obstacles to getting started. Get a buddy if possible.
- Choose a creative goal—some way that you personally would love to try coloring outside the lines. Acquire the necessary materials, make a date with yourself to spend some private time with that creative work, and keep your process to yourself for now—or take a beginner’s class, if that’s more helpful.
- As you go through your daily life, keep your senses alert for adventures both large and small that you might like to try. Do you detect any strong emotional response, any yearnings or sadness? These feelings might be a clue to the adventures that are calling to you.

## Covenant for Venturing

I hereby covenant to venture into new territories and realms, both interior and exterior.

I will do this by

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_