

Study Guide for *Love Unbroken*

Questions for each chapter:

To help you resolve your own life's trauma and distress, and
To guide you toward awakening to your true nature as love unbroken

Prologue: Heartbreak

What is the deepest heartbreak in your life? Can you name the greatest losses and disappointments in your life and hold these tenderly in your awareness as you work through the study questions for this book?

Have you experienced the presence of unconditional love in your life? Through another human being? With an animal? In nature? Directly from spirit?

Do you know what Susan means when she mentions the healing that comes from being in the “redemptive presence of unconditional love”? If not, are you open to experiencing that presence in your own life? If you have not yet touched the “love unbroken” that lives beyond our human heartbreaks, are you willing to let yourself be led (maybe even through this book) into that mystery?

Chapter 1: This Should Never Have Happened!

Reflect on the incidents in your own life in which you felt “This should never have happened!” Recall each such incident fully. What did you feel at the time? Allow yourself to open simply to the feelings that surrounded this incident—regret, guilt, shame, fear, or whatever. As you open to the feelings, can there be an attitude of simple curiosity, a willingness to explore what is here?

How do you feel about these incidents now? Have your feelings mellowed with time, or are they still as acute and painful as they were then? Can you consider opening to remembrance of these incidents with compassion for yourself and for all concerned?

How close do you feel now to total acceptance of the incident(s)? Can you embrace the reality that “It happened, it just happened.”

Chapter 2: What on Earth Can We Do Now?

What were the ramifications in your life of the traumatic or stressful incident(s) you named and explored in response to the questions for Chapter 1? Were there legal or psychological implications? Review the impact that these incidents have had on the course of your life.

Have you done therapy on these traumas? If so, what benefit did you derive from the therapy?

Chapter 3: Rainforest Sacrament

What ways other than therapy have you found to help resolve the traumatic incidents of your life? Do they feel fully resolved or not?

What is your reaction to reading that Pam's parents are considering giving their disturbed thirteen-year old daughter a powerful psycho-active substance, the *ayahuasca* tea?

What are your attitudes in general toward psycho-active substances? Have you read Dr. Andrew Weil's book *From Chocolate to Morphine*? Do you feel you have an understanding of the vast array of substances—both legal and illegal, both harmful and helpful—that people use to alter consciousness? Have you ever experienced any? What substances? Did you find the experience(s) harmful or helpful?

Do you have any experience of those mind-altering natural substances called *entheogens* (those which can open a felt connection to the Divine and which native people call “sacred plants,” such as *ayahuasca* or *peyote*?) If so, what was the context for your use—in a ceremony or in another form? Do you now regard the experience as helpful or as harmful? If you did have any kind of spiritual opening with the use of *entheogens*, what do you now think of that (those) experience(s)? Have they stayed with you or not?

Chapter 4: Diving Deep

How do you react as you read of Donovan's healing from nicotine addiction during his initial experiences with the *Daime*? Does this seem believable to you?

What are your responses to Susan's sharing of her spiritual experiences with *Daime*? Are they believable to you? How do you react to Susan's description of her encounters with the Divine Mother archetype? Does this have resonance for you, or not?

What is/are the deepest spiritual experience(s) you ever had? In what context? Has your perspective on life shifted as a result of these spiritual revelations? How? Has this spiritual perspective stayed with you or has it faded?

Have you ever experienced any form of addiction – to drugs, alcohol, nicotine, food, negative relationships? Do you still feel in the grips of an addiction, or has it faded into the background? If you feel mostly healed of this addiction, what, if anything, have you done to overcome your addiction?

Chapter 5: God is Real and Inside Me

What is your response to Pam's initial *Daimé* experience in which she has an out-of-body journey? Is it believable to you? Have you ever had an out-of-body experience or read about such experiences? If you believe that such experiences are real, what does it do to your idea of who you think you are (beyond the usual idea that "I" am this body?) If awareness can be present viewing the body from "outside" the usual boundaries of the body, what is that awareness?

If you sense that "I" am more or different from just this particular body and mind with this particular personality living in this time and place in history, what is that "more" that you sense? Are you interested in the question, "What am I?"

In her first *Daimé* work Pam's mind was opened to a realization that she was more than just the body and that there was more than just this physical world. Have you ever had such a realization in your own life—at what age? And in what context?

After her first *Daimé* work, Pam reports, "I know that God is real and inside me." Does this resonate with you or not?

Chapter 6: Run to the Slums

In this chapter Pam is pulled into a very dark place by her use of cocaine and by her attachment to her drug dealer. How do you relate to this in your own life? Have there been periods of darkness in which you have felt under the sway of negative or even evil people?

Let come to mind the scenes of when you were at your worst, behaving badly and/or under the influence of negative people, drugs or alcohol. See if you can hold these scenes in your mind without trying to change anything; just seeing clearly what happened. Can you bring compassion to the scenes you are witnessing in your mind? Can you accept fully the person you were then?

In this chapter Susan has a panic attack after her daughter runs away to the *favela* (Brazilian slum). Have you ever experienced an attack of panic, or intense fear? What was that experience like for you? As you recall such moments, can you hold those times with compassion?

Chapter 7: No Escape from Ourselves

Have you ever voluntarily put yourself into an environment where your aim was solely to explore the contents of your own consciousness—an extended retreat, an

intensive workshop, a vision quest, time in a monastery or ashram? How did you react to the leadership, discipline, and structure of this setting? Did you feel confined or supported? Did the time in this environment feel productive or not? What did you learn?

In this chapter Susan and Donovan assume their daughter Pam is pregnant and start to organize their lives around this assumption, which later proves to be false. Have you ever believed something to be true, and based your life choices around that belief, only to later discover that what you believed was not true? How did you handle the disorientation of that discovery?

Chapter 8: Conscious Deception

Have you ever consciously deceived someone? If so, did you believe you were doing so for their own good? Do you think that it is ever right for a parent to deceive a child in the way that Susan did to Pam in this part of the story?

Have you ever been so desperate for direction in your life that you prayed for a sign to show you what to do? If so, were you given the sign you prayed for? Did you allow yourself to be guided by something beyond the rational mind?

Chapter 9: Tough Love

How do you relate to the concept of “tough love”? Have you ever been in the position of needing to set strong boundaries and to enforce consequences with someone whom you felt was mistreating you?

Have you ever been the recipient of someone else’s firmness or tough love? How did you react?

How effective do you think externally imposed discipline can be in changing people?

In this chapter Susan recalls an incident in which her four-year old daughter was sexually abused by an adult man. Has anything like this ever happened to you? To someone you love? How serious was the impact of this abuse on your (or the other person’s) later life?

How do you relate to Susan’s story of feeling the pain of guilt and receiving the forgiveness of Mother Ocean? Have you ever felt overwhelmed with guilt and shame in the belief that you have done something really terrible and hurt another person? Have you found a way to offer and accept forgiveness for yourself?

Chapter 10: Sent By the Moon

Have you ever been crushed by someone else's negative judgment of you, believing you really were as bad as that person seemed to believe you were? (Compare your experience to Susan's description of internalizing the judgment of "bad mother"?) How did you find your way back to your own self-respect? How susceptible do you feel you are to picking up and believing the negative judgments of people around you?

Have you ever received guidance from a source that felt to be beyond you? What was that experience like? How do you relate to Susan's experience of feeling the Moon as a form of the archetype of the Divine Mother, speaking to her and guiding her to go on her rescue mission to Omaha?

Have you ever followed your personal guidance in a direction that was not supported by those around you, but which you nonetheless followed because the guidance was so compelling? What happened as a result?

How do you relate to the final mantra Susan repeats on her way to Omaha: "There is only love and forgiveness. All else is illusion."?

Chapter 11: Cops and Robbers

How do you relate to Susan's determination to rescue her seventeen-year-old daughter who is using drugs? Do you consider it: Foolish? Excessive? Heroic? How far would you go to rescue your underage child from drug abuse?

How do you relate to Susan's experience of being led by an angel into the courthouse where she secures the papers needed to get Pam committed to a mental hospital? Does this seem believable to you? Have you ever felt the presence of an angel in your life?

Chapter 12: Sexual Possession

Have you ever experienced yourself behaving in negative ways that were out of your control? Did you ever have the feeling that you were possessed by a negative entity that was in some way using your body to act out its own negative agenda?

Does the idea of negative spirit possession seem plausible to you or not?

Chapter 13: Jungle Exorcism

How do you relate to the primitive methods of exorcism that are described in this chapter?

Does it seem believable that these series of exorcisms and healings actually helped Pamela? If not, do you have any theory about her apparent improvement in behavior?

Chapter 14: Finding the Good Again

How do you relate to the description of the *Daime* ceremonies in this chapter? Do they seem bizarre? believable? intriguing? What is your response to reading about Susan's experience of helping the negative and suffering spirit entity of Pam's former drug dealer?

At the end of the chapter the bottom drops out of the life Pam had been living as a member of a serious spiritual community when the leader of the community is diagnosed with terminal illness. And then the bottom drops out of Susan's world. Have you ever experienced such a sudden change of events that turned your world upside down in a flash? How did it make you feel?

Chapter 15: Through the Door of Devastation

Does the description of the awakened state, as described in the book *Journey to No-Self* (quoted in this chapter) hold any appeal to you?

In the outdoor tomb of the founder of the *Santo Daime* church Susan found the "safe space" she needed to go through her grief and loss, and find a new space of centeredness and calm. Do you have a safe space for your own process of releasing pain? What is that space for you?

Have you ever let yourself fall deeply into your emotional pain? Susan speaks of going so deep into her pain that she feels emptied out and cleansed. Do you know from your own experience what Susan is talking about?

At the end of this chapter Susan senses that she needs to take the next steps in her journey on her own. Have you ever had moments like that in your own journey, when you knew that no one else could show you where to go, that you needed to find your own way, alone? What was that like?

Chapter 16: The Mother and I Are One

Does Susan's break-through to oneness have any resonance for you? Have you ever had a similar taste of that reality? What was that experience like for you? Even though the reality you have been shown is beyond words, can you find the words that best describe what you experienced?

Susan dropped into a state of consciousness in which she experienced oneness with all creation, in which she (briefly) ceased identifying her “self” as something separate from anything else. The words that came to her included, “This is It” and, later, “The Mother and I are One.” How do you react to these words? Do either of these summations of her experience convey anything real to you?

If Susan’s description of her experience seems foreign to you, how do you relate to it? As something you are open to but have not experienced yourself? As something you think is possible for others but not for you? As something you don’t quite believe is possible for anyone? As self-delusion? As only a drug experience?

After her spiritual opening in the tomb, Susan finds herself grateful to Pam for having pushed her so far, stretching her capacity both for feeling her pain and for receiving the grace of spirit. Have you ever felt grateful to someone in your life who “pushed your buttons” or provoked strong reactions in you, because you could see that this person was helping you to go more deeply into yourself?

Chapter 17: No One Wants to Be an Addict

Have you ever bent over backwards to help someone else whom you loved? How far were you willing to go to try to help this person? How did it work out? Did you end up feeling good about your efforts or did you feel bad for failing to save this person from him/herself?

Do you admire Susan’s going so far to help Pam? Or do you think she was foolish?

Do you relate to the idea of co-dependency, that a person can actually be addicted to helping someone else? Have you ever felt the compulsion to do something to help another?

Chapter 18: Complete Defeat

Have you ever felt completely defeated in your effort to make something happen in your life that you wanted very much? How was that for you?

Have you ever felt bitter, punitive or revengeful toward someone whom you believed hurt or betrayed you?

Have you been able to discern the negative effects on yourself of holding attitudes of bitterness or revenge? Have you sought to drop these negative attitudes and to forgive the person who hurt you? Have you been able to let go and forgive the other?

What spiritual practices have helped you to forgive those whom you believed have hurt you?

Do you have any daily spiritual practices—times for turning inward, for prayer, for quiet contemplation? What are these?

If you have not yet been able to let go and forgive, do you aspire to do so? What do you think might help you let go into forgiveness?

Chapter 19: Letting Go of Experts

Donovan and Susan take a vacation in Rio Branco, Brazil, the Amazonian town which was the birthplace of the *Santo Daime*. What do you think of their choice to spend their vacation in this way?

Have you ever relied on psychological experts or spiritual teachers to help you and later felt these experts disappointed you? Were you able to let go of your reliance on experts and become your own authority in this area?

Susan once again has the experience of dropping into deep emotional pain, and feeling emptied out and cleansed by it. How do you relate to this? Have you been able to drop into your own emotional pain without any blame toward others for the pain that you are feeling? Can you see any benefit in keeping your heart open to someone you love, even when there is a lot of pain in the relationship?

Have you ever felt the need to let go of someone in your family with whom you were overly involved? Were you able to do this? How?

How do you relate to the first three steps of Al-Anon: 1) Acknowledged we were powerless over the other person, 2) Came to believe in a power greater than ourselves, and 3) Made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to that Higher Power.

Chapter 20: Wild Child

Reflect back on your own wildest adventures in life. What motivated you at the time to explore beyond the reach of conventional expectations? How did your adventures turn out?

Have you ever been in the grips of drug or alcohol abuse, or of some stubborn negative pattern in yourself which seemed to control your life and lead you into bizarre places? What was that like for you? Can you accept who you were then?

Have you ever witnessed someone else's drug abuse or other addictive behavior which led them into dangerous places and out-of-control behavior? How did/does this affect you? Can you accept them as they were/are?

At the end of the chapter Pam remembers perhaps the greatest spiritual teaching she has been given by the *Daimon*: that, even though her outer behavior is completely controlled by her addiction to drugs, this outer behavior is not who she essentially is. She is able, even then, to witness what is happening from some distance. She has the certainty that her real self—which is witnessing this drama—is not the same as her crazy addict personality or her negative behavior, that her inner spiritual nature is still intact behind the outer drama of her drug-addicted life. Is this an awareness that makes sense to you? Have you been able to feel the same about yourself—that no matter how negative or crazy your outer behavior, there is a place inside that is still whole and good and intact? If not, is this a realization that you aspire to have?

Chapter 21: Hitting Bottom

Have you ever been obsessed with another person's behavior? Have you worried yourself sick about that person?

Have you developed a spiritual practice which allows you to look at your thoughts—including the worry thoughts—without being entirely caught up in your thinking? Have you developed the ability to observe your thoughts objectively without necessarily believing your thoughts? Have you been able to explore the unconscious beliefs that fuel your obsessive or worry thoughts? What, if anything, helps to lessen your attachment to the worry thoughts?

What is your own deepest confrontation with the reality of your own death? Have you ever been given glimpses of a level of being that transcends the death of the physical body? or not?

Have you ever faced a serious health crisis? How did it turn out for you? If you recovered fully, was there a sense of a re-birth such as Susan experienced?

Chapter 22: Miracle on the Street

Have you ever taken the time to talk with a street person or a down-and-out drug addict? How did these people make you feel—about yourself? about life? Do they scare you? Are you able to view such a person with compassion? As you read about the lives of two long-term drug users, Jeff and Karen, what response do you have to them?

How do you respond to Susan's report of Pam's gaining inner strength from her time on the street as a drug addict? Does it seem believable to you?

Have you ever felt that certain people came into your life as angels to help you at a point when you couldn't help yourself?

Chapter 23: What Will Work?

Is there someone in your life who is on a dangerous path—with drug or alcohol addiction or some other self-destructive path—with whom you feel strongly connected? Are you able to maintain a relationship? Are you able to practice detachment along with staying connected?

Have you ever been in a treatment center or mental health facility or some other context for personal change where you felt constricted by someone else's narrow definition of who you are?

When you look at someone who is on a self-destructive path, how do you view them? Do you feel judgmental? or compassionate? Are you able to see their essential goodness behind the self-destructiveness? Are you able to keep your heart open? If not, what closes your heart? Can you feel the pain of their situation without being overwhelmed by that pain?

Do you agree with Susan's conclusion that the addict needs to be seen from a spiritual perspective, not just through the lens of their addiction, psychological illness(es) or mental distortion(s)?

Chapter 24: Waiting in Faith

What is your response to Susan's efforts to find the right treatment modality for her daughter?

How do you relate to the possibility that a psycho-active substance like *ibogaine* might be used in the treatment of addiction?

How do you respond to Susan's story of reconciliation with her aged mother? What is your relationship to your parents? How fully have you come to peace with your childhood experience of them?

Chapter 25: Recovery and Relapse

Pam finally finds a context for her healing from addiction that works (for a while). What do you think were the elements that made this place work for her?

Even after Pam was free of drugs physically, the negative thought patterns of addiction persisted. Have you ever found something like this in yourself—that even after

you have given up some destructive pattern, the temptation to return to the negative thinking is still there?

Susan finally lets go of the illusion that she can do anything about her daughter's relapse. Even when Pam is suicidal, Susan is able to let her go to her own destiny with love. Have you been able to let go of someone you love who is in terrible shape? Have you been able to keep your heart open to the pain of their situation without having to change anything?

Chapter 26: Death and the Deathless

Have you ever been present for the death of a loved one? What was the experience like for you? Did it affect your view of what death is? Did it affect your view of what human life is all about?

Does the story in this chapter stir any of your feelings or judgments: About illegal immigrants? About how bodies are treated after they die? Just notice whatever reactions you might have to these elements of Susan and Pam's story, and do not attempt to come to any conclusions.

Susan describes an experience of the foundational love she has experienced "waking up" inside her to reveal itself as the truth of what she is. Does this resonate with you? Do the following words make any sense to you: "In this love there is no room for two"?

Chapter 27: New Life

Have you ever been present for the birth of a child? What was the experience like for you? How did it affect your view of what life in a human body is all about?

How do you relate to Susan's description of the "eternal springtime of spirit beneath the changing seasons of outer appearances"? Is this something you, too, have experienced? If not, does it appeal to you? Do you feel called to know this reality in yourself?

Epilogue: Love Unbroken

Life always gives us opportunities to remember the deepest spiritual truths we have been shown. Are you able to remember the deepest truth you have been shown, or does it seem to vanish in the face of life's challenges? How do you relate to Susan's

suggestion that the inevitable difficulties in your own life might be seen as “love’s invitation to drop all judgments and defenses and simply open to whatever is present”?

Has reading this book deepened your faith? Has living through your own crises and life challenges deepened your faith? Do you sense that “mysterious presence that repairs each apparent tear in the fabric of life, not by eliminating it, but by revealing it as a necessary part of the tapestry's deeper design”?

I offer this book and these questions in the hope that my words may bring some comfort and open up greater depth in your own spiritual journey.

Namasté (From the God in me to the God in you ... Salutations),

Susan Thesenga