



12 Step Zen

Pathways
of Recovery

Peter Kuhn

Foreword by KEVIN GRIFFIN, author of *One Breath at a Time*

WORKING COMPANION

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A Note to the Reader

This is a guide for practice, not a test of understanding. It follows the architecture of 12 Step Zen: three movements of refuge and the Seven Factors of Awakening. The practices invite daily sitting, mindfulness in ordinary activities, written reflection, investigation, and the gradual application of spiritual principles in recovery.

You may use the guide privately, with a sponsor or mentor, alongside therapy or spiritual direction, or with a small practice group. Take what is useful. Set aside what is not timely. Some questions may ripen only after repeated reading and practice.

No prior knowledge of Buddhism or meditation is required. Curiosity, willingness, and the support appropriate to your recovery are enough.

A NOTE ON PACE This guide is built to unfold slowly—most readers move through one Factor of Awakening every two to four weeks, living with each of its two Studies for a week or two before continuing. Read it as you would a Step, not a chapter: there is no benefit to finishing quickly.

IMPORTANT BOUNDARY This guide does not replace sponsorship, fellowship literature, treatment, therapy, medical care, or crisis support. It is independent and is not approved, endorsed, or sponsored by Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, or any other Twelve-Step fellowship.

Working Safely and Honestly

- The book and this guide are intended as a supplement to traditional Twelve-Step recovery. Do not use these pages to undertake a formal Fourth Step, Fifth Step, or amends process without the guidance appropriate to your recovery path.
- Take your time reviewing the guide and unpacking the book. Find your rhythm as you read, reflect, absorb, and embody what is offered. Stay as long as you like with any sections and make a home in them before moving on.
- Savor the parts that are tasty and relevant for you. Don't force the ones that aren't. Pause between bites and allow time for the offerings to digest, to metabolize and nourish you.
- Set reasonable goals that you can achieve in your practice. Meet yourself where you are with kindness, acceptance, and patience. If you fall short, come back to the goodness of your intention. Like drops of water filling a barrel, the fruits of recovery and practice will ripen slowly.
- You never need to close your eyes, control your breath, force a memory, disclose trauma, or continue a meditation that leaves you less grounded.
- If shame, craving, traumatic activation, or risk of harm intensifies, pause the exercise and seek human support.
- Measure practice by well-being, kindness, and willingness to return—not by serenity, special experiences, or uninterrupted concentration.
- Find a Sangha or fellowship; enjoy the company and support of friends on the path.

A Simple Rhythm

WHEN PRACTICE EMPHASIS

Morning • 10–25 minutes Sit, walk, pray, or practice with a reflection or exercise.

During the day • brief returns Use an everyday activity as a bell of mindfulness. Every conscious breath is a moment of awakening.

Evening • 5–10 minutes Review with a smile; write a few honest lines.

Weekly Enjoy the seven-day practices and connect with friends on the path.

How to Use This Guide

The Seven Factors of Awakening are gathered into three Parts. Each Factor is divided into two Studies, and each Study is meant to be lived with over a week or two—not read in a single sitting.

STUDY Each Study opens with a **PRACTICE INTENTION**: one sentence naming what the whole Study is inviting you toward. Within it are several **Movements**, one for each major section of that chapter in 12 Step Zen.

MOVEMENT Each Movement contains a **Read pointer**, **Reflection questions**, and a **Practice**.

READ A page range from the book. Read it first. The Movement's reflections and practice grow out of that passage and will mean less without it.

REFLECTION Two to four questions, meant to be sat with rather than answered quickly. Some will only ripen after you return to them—on a different day, or in a different season of recovery.

PRACTICE A named exercise, usually built from the passage you just read. Each one opens with two lines: **Source**, which grounds the practice in a passage from the book, a teaching adapted into steps, or occasionally a technique carried forward from another Factor's practice; and **Purpose**, a single sentence naming what the practice is for. The numbered steps that follow are meant to be walked through slowly, not rushed.

SEVEN DAYS OF PRACTICE At the close of each Study, seven invitations gathered from its teachings and practices into a week's rhythm. It's a different door to walk through each day, not a checklist to finish.

Carry Forward A single line or question, often quoted directly from the book, meant to travel with you after you've closed the guide—something to return to in a meeting, in traffic, in an ordinary moment.

You don't need to complete every Reflection or every day of practice before moving on. Move at the pace of your own attention, not the pace of the page.

How the Steps Are Referenced

The Twelve Steps are quoted and unpacked in the chapter and page range shown; that passage is its direct textual home, though its themes continue to surface elsewhere.

STEP WHERE IT APPEARS AND PRACTICE EMPHASIS

“Step Zero” Mindfulness, “Step Zero” (pp. 12–16): the author’s own term for the moment of surrender before recovery becomes possible. Not one of the Twelve Steps, but the threshold the book treats as their precondition.

Step One Mindfulness, “Walking the Path” (pp. 19–21): “We admitted that we are powerless over our addiction... and that our lives had become unmanageable.” Honesty, surrender, recognition of unmanageability.

Step Two Mindfulness, “Coming to Our Senses” (pp. 22–24): “We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” Open-mindedness, restoration, trust beyond isolated will.

Step Three Mindfulness, “Three Treasures” (pp. 31–32): “We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood him.” Surrender, vow, commitment to the path.

Steps Four and Five Investigation, “Looking Deeply” and “Stepping into Freedom” (pp. 43–49): the fearless moral inventory, then sharing it with another person. Honest inquiry held in relationship.

Steps Six and Seven Investigation, “The Perfection of Aspiration” (pp. 52–54): readiness, then humility, in transforming “defects of character.” Readiness and humility.

Steps Eight and Nine Diligence, “Reconciliation” (pp. 67–69): the list of harms, then direct amends “except when to do so would injure them or others.” Responsibility, repair, non-harming.

Step Ten Diligence, “Polishing the Gem” (pp. 78–80): continued personal inventory and prompt admission of wrongs. Continuous, honest self-correction.

Step Eleven Ease, “The Eleventh Step” (pp. 107–108): prayer and meditation “to improve our conscious contact.” Prayer, meditation, listening.

Step Twelve Equanimity, “Love in Action” (pp. 161–164): the spiritual awakening that carries the message and “practice[s] these principles in all our affairs.” Awakening expressed as service.

Suggested Sources for Step Study

- The literature of your own fellowship and other Buddhist recovery resources
- A sponsor or other experienced member of that fellowship
- The Twelve Steps as printed in the appendix to *12 Step Zen*
- Working the Steps with someone will deepen your understanding and practice of the Dharma, just as the Dharma will deepen your understanding and practice of the Twelve Steps.

REMEMBER A Step reference is an invitation to consult your recovery tradition. It is not an instruction to complete formal Step work alone. SEE ALSO For a fuller map of where each Step surfaces elsewhere in the book—beyond its direct textual home—see “Steps, The Twelve” in the Index to the Book at the back of this guide.

Part One: Taking Refuge— Mindfulness and Investigation

First Factor: Mindfulness

Steps Zero through Three (pp. 7–37)

This part follows the book's own opening movement: turning toward suffering as a Dharma door, and taking refuge in what can actually hold us. Like Investigation, it unfolds in two studies, each moving through several distinct movements—one per section of the book—so each keeps its own weight rather than blurring into the next.

Study One—Suffering and Surrender: There Is a Solution, and Appropriate Attention

Step Zero and Step One · pp. 7–21

PRACTICE INTENTION To meet suffering as a Dharma door, not a verdict—solution-oriented, the way the book turns “problems” into “problem-solving.”

Waking Up to Life & Is Suffering Noble?

Read pp. 7–11

Reflection

- When has unexpected goodness emerged from disappointment or a challenging situation? • Has your idea of happiness ever caused you suffering—drugs, candy, getting, or completing something, and so on? • What does it mean to be solution-oriented rather than brilliantly negative?

Practice: Brilliantly Positive

Source Bucky Fuller’s line to the author—“It’s easy to be brilliantly negative. The challenge is to be brilliantly positive and find solutions” (p. 10). Purpose To practice turning a complaint into a question, on the spot, in ordinary friction.

1. Notice a moment of ordinary friction today—a red light, a slow line, being on hold.
2. Name the frustration or complaint.
3. Pause, breathe, and surrender your attachment to it.
4. Is this an opportunity or an obstacle? What solution may be hiding in the problem?
5. Ask, “What is mine to accept, and what is mine to do?” Choose one small, skillful response.
6. Notice what shifts when you move from complaint to possibility. Make a home in that shift as you go through the day.

Samsara: The Cycle of Suffering & Step Zero

Read pp. 11–16

Reflection

- What repeated behaviors or expectations—your wheels of samsara—are causing you distress? • Does the stimulus or the response turn the wheel? • Can we “call” a bottom and generate moments of clarity, or does it happen to us?

Practice: Mindfulness of Body

Source “Step Zero” (pp. 12–16)—the author’s own account of learning “mindfulness of the body in the body” in what he calls his Pinto moment. Purpose To let mindfulness of body become the ground beneath a mindful mind—“an embodied mind and a mindful body.”

1. Find a comfortable posture. Notice if you are standing, sitting, walking, or lying down.
2. Where is it easiest to be with your breath? The tip of the nose, the nasal passages, or the sensation of your lungs filling and emptying? Make a home there.
3. Become aware of your whole body. Let the body breathe. Enjoy the rise and fall of your breath.
4. Allow yourself to ground. Feel the contact of seat and earth. Where is your center of gravity?
5. A mindful body is an embodied mind.

Appropriate Attention

Read pp. 16–19

Reflection

- How do you stay willing and teachable? • Is happiness conditional, depending on circumstances and outcomes? • How can you practice surrender in everyday life? Perhaps at traffic signals, while waiting on hold, or when moving from reaction to response?

Practice: Generating Happiness

Source “Appropriate Attention” (pp. 16–19)—the teaching that conditions for happiness are always available if we look deeply, and Thay’s line: “Sometimes your smile is the result of your happiness. Sometimes your happiness is the result of your smile.” Purpose To practice refreshing and renewing happiness rather than waiting for it to arrive on its own.

1. Practice identifying conditions for happiness: the presence of something wonderful, or the absence of something undesirable. 2. Breathing mindfully, bring mind to body and practice shifting from the thought of a condition to the embodied feeling of happiness. 3. Nourish the feeling. When the mind or attention wanders, bring it back. Refresh and renew it. 4. Practice mindful awareness of attention. Am I lured by a shiny object, or self-directing toward freedom and liberation?

If this does not feel supportive: Stop... Set the practice aside. Name the habit out loud to someone else instead of working it alone.

Walking the Path—Step One

Read pp. 19–21

Reflection

- Explore the difference between powerlessness over things I cannot change and unmanageability, as my reaction to that. • If surrender is a change of perception, how do we initiate the shift? • Where does surrender still feel like defeat, rather than the letting go the book describes?

Practice: Stop and Release

Source “Walking the Path” (pp. 19–21)—the author’s image of holding a beach ball underwater. Purpose To practice release instead of the exhausting work of holding something down.

1. Sit comfortably and settle into mindful breathing, following the in-breath and out-breath from beginning to end. Calm the body. 2. Think of a small annoyance, frustration, or situation you resist. Stay with the breath. Explore the feeling of resistance in the body. Where is there tension, tightness, or stress? 3. Imagine holding a beach ball underwater, and let go. Practice release in mind and body. 4. As you go through the day, notice when stress arises. Coming back to the breath, stop and release. 5. When the small things are bothersome, shift your perception from the micro to the macro. When the big picture is distressing, shift your attention to small conditions for happiness.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Practice mindful breathing in everyday moments, touching what is real and true: breathing in, I know I am reading, standing, sitting, watching TV, in a meeting. Breathing out is happiness. 2. Practice mindful breathing and smiling. A small, soft smile will do. Breathing in, I smile. Breathing out, I smile. 3. Practice Stop and Release: notice tension and resistance, practice surrender and release. 4. Practice noticing what is good and beautiful in others, the world, and yourself.

5. Practice kindness and curiosity. 6. Turn an obstacle into an opportunity with awareness, acceptance, and surrender. 7. Practice walking in freedom. Embody the freedoms we have and can enjoy.

Carry Forward This difficulty is not a wall. It is the door.

Study Two—Coming to Our Senses, Our Original Nature, the Two Truths, Taking Refuge

Steps Two and Three · pp. 22–37

PRACTICE INTENTION To come home to a well-being that doesn't depend on outer conditions—restoration, not repair; refuge, not escape.

Coming to Our Senses—Step Two

Read pp. 22–25

Reflection

- Are we powerless over our thoughts and feelings? Can we prevent or transform unwholesome states from arising, or cultivate and nourish wholesome ones? • Based on the evidence of your lived experience, have you come to believe in a path or practice leading to well-being? • Do plants or animals need to prove their worthiness? How are we different?

Practice: Feeling Tone

Source “Coming to Our Senses” (pp. 22–25)—mindfulness of feeling, the Second Establishment of Mindfulness. Purpose To notice that even a neutral sensation, once attended to, often reveals a quiet form of pleasure.

1. Pause and notice one physical sensation right now—temperature, contact, pressure.
2. Name its tone: pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
3. If neutral, stay with it a moment longer than usual. Is it quietly pleasant? Allow it to shift.
4. Let the sensation change or pass. Notice that too.
5. Practice mindfulness of feeling tones with wall colors, strangers, objects, and other sensory input.
6. Nourish the pleasant; be nourished by it. Observe the neutral elements we normally skim past. Care for the unpleasant with curiosity and interest.

Our Original Nature

Read pp. 25–28

Reflection

- Do you have Buddha/recovery nature? Are we fundamentally broken, or masterpieces in need of a little restoration? • If “the mind is always searching outside itself and never feels fulfilled,” is it the enemy of our serenity? • Is our addiction to grasping, seeking, wanting, and getting systemic and conditioned, or a personal flaw? • What would it mean to stop seeking and recognize that we are already enough, and that peace is already here?

Practice: Arriving

Source The book's use of the Plum Village gatha: “I have arrived, I am home. In the here and in the now. I am solid, I am free. In the ultimate I dwell” (pp. 27–28). Purpose To practice stopping and arriving in the middle of ordinary motion, not just on the cushion.

1. Find a comfortable posture and settle into the breath.
2. Silently arrive with each in-breath, and feel at home with the out-breath. Stay with this a while. Arrive— home.
3. Feel one point of contact—feet on the floor, clothes on the skin, breath in the body. The contact is here, manifesting now.
4. Breathing in, touch the here. Breathing out, touch the now. Feel your solidity in the here, freedom in the now. What here is to space, now is to time.

5. Practice arrive/home, here/now, with your mindful breathing throughout the day—with your footsteps, loved ones, in meetings, or driving your car. Home is wherever we are.
6. Fully present for life, mind and body, spirit and matter, past, present, and future are all one. Touch it, taste it.

The Two Truths

Read pp. 28–31

Reflection

- Where have I mistaken a label—a story about myself or someone else—for the whole truth?
- Are the Two Truths a theory, or a practical way of shifting our perception?
- Have you touched the ultimate dimension? How can it inform everyday life?

Practice: Two Truths, One Day

Source “The Two Truths” (pp. 28–31)—the historical and ultimate dimensions, and the parable of the mountain. Purpose To notice, in real time, when a label is standing in for the whole truth.

1. Choose one label you use often—about yourself, another person, or a situation.
2. Notice the relative truth in it: what’s actually true, conventionally.
3. Ask what’s also true in the ultimate dimension—the conditions, history, and impermanence behind the label.
4. Let both truths stand together, without needing to resolve them.
5. Cultivate Right View by looking with fresh eyes, seeing both the fixed and fluid, composite nature of all that is.
6. Seeing the causes and conditions that have shaped us, allow Right Understanding to nourish your compassion.

Three Treasures & Taking Refuge—Step Three

Read pp. 31–37

Reflection

- Where do you find refuge? What are your happy places and ports in the storm?
- Do you have evidence of your awakened nature? What conditions are supporting your liberation?
- How does the Three Refuges chant inform your life and recovery?

Practice: Taking Refuge in the Breath

Source Adapted from the book’s refuge teachings and Plum Village breathing practice. Purpose To establish a compassionate beginning rather than demanding a particular state.

1. Sit, stand, or lie down in a position that feels supported. Notice the contact of the earth, the atmosphere, and the conditions of safety, wherever you are.
2. On the in-breath, recognize the body: “I have arrived in this body.” On the out-breath, let the body breathe. Recognize the miracle of life and your body.
3. Touch the goodness of the moment: we are designed to be successful. Mother Nature supports us with air, water, and food, metabolized and sustaining life with no conscious effort or condition of worthiness.
4. Take refuge in the now: reflect on all the kindness, help, and support you have ever received. Every meal, breath, joy, and challenge has brought you to this very moment.
5. Touch the goodness of the moment: the breath, awareness itself, sobriety, freedom from anger, or shame.
6. Taking refuge in the breath is touching life itself: miraculous, mysterious, supporting, and uplifting.
7. Stopping and calming, coming home to the now, we nourish our safety and resilience, and reaffirm the goodness of life.

If this does not feel supportive: Stop... Keep your eyes open, orient to the room, or name three visible objects.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Practice awareness of feeling tones, and nourishing the pleasant and caring for the unpleasant. 2. Practice Arriving before answering the door, telephone, or sharing in a meeting. 3. Ask yourself, early and often: "Am I taking refuge, or seeking escape?" Notice the difference without judging it. 4. Practice with the Two Truths, noticing the labels you use and accept as reality. 5. Take Refuge in the Breath, slowly, with joy. 6. As you go through the day, check in with yourself: "Am I truly present, with openness and curiosity?" 7. Practice coming home, to the breath and the path. Take refuge, dwell there, and be the refuge for others.

Carry Forward I am not broken. I am restoring.

Second Factor: Investigation

Steps Four through Seven (pp. 39–61)

Where Mindfulness remembers, Investigation looks. This factor unfolds in two studies, and each study moves through several distinct movements—one per section of the book—so that each keeps its own weight rather than blurring into the next.

Study Three—Looking Deeply: Seeing with the Buddha Eye

Steps Four and Five—the roots of suffering and liberation · pp. 39–52

PRACTICE INTENTION To look at what mindfulness reveals with the Buddha eye, seeing causes and conditions, and discovering that suffering is the ground of awakening, not separate from it.

Opening the Buddha Eye

Read pp. 39–42

Reflection

- When I look beneath the surface of this experience, what causes and conditions do I see? • How have my ancestors, community, culture, and past experiences contributed to this moment? • What conditions are we creating when an ordinary frustration becomes a “mindfulness bell,” inviting a wiser response?

Practice: Looking Deeply

Source “Opening the Buddha Eye” (pp. 39–42)—the book’s teaching on interbeing, seen through a blade of kusha grass and a traffic jam. Purpose To see an ordinary object as a web of causes and conditions rather than a fixed, separate thing.

1. Notice a cup, a pen, or another ordinary object. What is its history, and how did it come to be? 2. How did it arrive here and now? What thoughts, efforts, inspiration, and elements is it composed of?

The Dharma Doors of Difficulty

Read pp. 42–43

Reflection

- Which “growing edge” or difficulty is presently offering me a doorway into growth? • What interpretation have I been mistaking for reality? • How might this suffering become the ground of awakening rather than evidence that I have failed?

Practice: What Is This?

Source The book’s teaching on stopping and looking deeply, and the teaching of the first and second arrow (pp. 39–46). Purpose To meet a triggered state with curiosity rather than a verdict.

1. When triggered, pause and ask simply: “What is this?” 2. Mindfulness of feeling: what sensation is here, and what fear or wrong view seems to have activated it? 3. Mindfulness of mind: notice your internal dialogue without judging it. Is this the first arrow, or a second arrow you’re adding? 4. Are these thoughts healing or harmful? Are they reinforcing a sense of victimhood, or the Medicine Buddha within you? 5. Let the fruit of understanding ripen, rather than forcing a conclusion.

If this does not feel supportive: Stop the inquiry and orient outward. Walk, drink water, or call a friend.

Looking Deeply: A Practice of Non-Fear—Step Four

Read pp. 43–47

Reflection

- Are we victims or victimizers? What “second arrows”—blaming, replaying, bitterness, or self-judgment—have I added to the first, unavoidable one?
- What does that hurting part need from me in the present moment?
- What becomes possible when I understand that feeling shame does not make me shameful?

Practice: Mindfulness of Feelings in the Body

Source The book’s teaching on mindfulness of feeling and the second arrow (pp. 44–46). Purpose To meet an emotion in the body rather than in the story about it.

1. Locate the emotion in the body. What sensations tell you it is present?
2. Drop the story. “Be” the feeling, allowing connection to other times you have felt it.
3. Welcome it with kind attention, softening around it—not pushing away, not fixing.
4. Let it be seen, heard, and valued.
5. Let the fruit of understanding ripen: what causes and conditions gave rise to it?

If this does not feel supportive: Stop the inquiry and orient outward. Walk, drink water, or contact support.

Stepping Into Freedom—Step Five

Read pp. 47–49

Reflection

- Do I have faith in the path and process of recovery, even when I doubt my ability to walk it?
- Do my mistakes and the parts of me I don’t like have spiritual value? What would it mean to include that part within your wholeness?
- How might my vulnerability become a source of connection rather than isolation?

Practice: Faith in the Path

Source Adapted from “Stepping into Freedom,” particularly the author’s experience of surrender before sharing his inventory and Thay Pháp Lưu’s teaching that faith in the Dharma can be confirmed through our own experience (pp. 47– 49).

Purpose To feel the evidence that the path is working and let that embodied faith support the next step.

1. Settle into the body and breath.
2. Check in with yourself. Meeting and accepting yourself just as you are in this moment.
3. If you are living clean, free of intoxicants, is that proof of process and a ground of faith to stand on?
4. Notice the felt sense of faith. Is there warmth, steadiness, openness, tenderness, or strength? Where does it live? Breathe with it and allow it to become a ground beneath you.
5. Ask, “What is the next step toward freedom?”
6. Commit to the next step on the path of freedom. Walk with integrity and freedom.

Healing the Past in the Present

Read pp. 49–52

Reflection

- What conclusions did my younger self form without having all the necessary information?
- Grounded in mindfulness, can I bring my younger self to the safety of the present?
- Can I recognize a parent or difficult person as a wounded child without excusing harmful behavior?
- What inherited suffering might I be carrying—and what resilience have I also inherited?

Practice: The Five-Year-Old Child Meditation

Source Thich Nhat Hanh’s meditation, as presented in “Healing the Past in the Present” (pp. 49–52).

Purpose To meet what shaped us with a warm, loving smile rather than reliving it as a verdict.

1. Settle into a comfortable posture. Place a hand on your heart or belly if that helps you arrive.
2. Breathing in, see yourself as a five-year-old child. Breathing out, smile to that child.
3. Breathing in, see the child as fragile and vulnerable. Breathing out, smile with love.
4. When ready, extend the same meditation to a parent or caregiver as a five-year-old—whichever feels more accessible.
5. Breathing in, see their difficulties living on in you now. Breathing out, aspire to the release of both of you.
6. Close by noticing: safety and peace, once theirs to give or withhold, are now also yours to offer.

If this does not feel supportive, stop and orient outward. This meditation is never a substitute for trauma-informed support.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Choose one experience and ask “What is this?”—see it as causes and conditions, not a fixed thing.
2. Turn toward one difficulty as a Dharma door rather than a wall.
3. Practice Mindfulness of Feelings in the Body with one manageable emotion.
4. Notice one second arrow you added to a first arrow today.
5. Share one small truth with a trusted person.
6. Practice the Five-Year-Old Child Meditation, even briefly.
7. Review: what became clearer this week when you looked with the Buddha eye instead of judgment?

Carry Forward The first arrow is not mine to prevent. The second is mine to lay down.

Study Four—The Perfection of Aspiration: Skillfulness

Steps Six and Seven, Tending the Garden of Mind · pp. 52–61

PRACTICE INTENTION To trade the language of defect and removal for the language of skillful and not-yet-skillful—tending what we water rather than fighting what we are.

The Perfection of Aspiration—Steps Six and Seven

Read pp. 52–55

Reflection

- How does describing assets and liabilities as skillful or “not yet skillful” change our relationship to them? • The author experienced absolute readiness as a feeling “in his bones,” then cultivated it as familiar ground he could return to. What does willingness or alignment with your highest aspiration feel like in your body? How might you nourish it without demanding that it remain? • The chapter describes shortcomings as “buddhas-to-be”—misguided instincts that can become teachers and assets in disguise. Which shortcoming might be pointing toward a quality you are called to cultivate? What antidote does it reveal?

Practice: Heart Meditation

Source Adapted from “The Perfection of Aspiration,” including the author’s embodied experience of absolute readiness and the antidotes to greed, anger, and ignorance: generosity, loving kindness, and wisdom (pp. 52–55). Purpose To meet a not-yet-skillful habit with compassion, touch the heart’s highest aspiration, and nourish the quality that can transform it.

1. Settle into the body and breath. Bring gentle attention to the heart space. Breathe into and through it, allowing the body and feelings to calm.
2. Bring to mind one manageable habit energy you sincerely wish to transform. Notice how you know it is present: a change in breath, muscle tension, posture, thought, or feeling. Stay with its embodied cues rather than rehearsing its story.
3. Look deeply at the causes and conditions that shaped it. What has this habit tried to obtain, avoid, or protect? Recognize that it is conditioned and impermanent—not a fixed defect and not the whole of who you are.
4. Touch your deepest aspiration. Ask, “Who do I sincerely want to be here? What suffering do I wish to stop causing?” Let the answer become a felt experience—warmth, openness, steadiness, willingness, or another quality alive in the heart. Nourish it with the breath.
5. Discern the antidote this habit is asking you to cultivate: generosity for grasping, loving kindness for anger and aversion, or wisdom for confusion and ignorance. Humbly ask God, your higher power, awakened nature, or the path itself to help you nourish that quality.
6. Release any attachment to transformation. Silently offer, “May this habit become a mindfulness bell and a teacher on the path.” When it returns, recognize it sooner, touch the heart of your aspiration, and begin again.

Tending the Garden of Mind & Selective Watering

Read pp. 55–61

Reflection

- Wholesome formations are also impermanent and must be nourished. Which quality have you assumed should remain available without care? How can you water it? • One seed can trigger another, like the “chain” between care, worry, and anxiety. What chain reaction is familiar to you? Where could mindfulness enter the sequence and change what is watered next? • Right Speech includes deep listening. Am I listening to my thoughts with care and interest, or just believing them? What seeds are you watering with your thoughts and internal dialogue?

Practice: Selective Watering

Source “Tending the Garden of Mind” and “Selective Watering” (pp. 55–59). Purpose To practice mindfulness of mind: recognize a mental formation, interrupt an unwholesome chain reaction, and water seeds that lead toward freedom.

Look deeply: what watered it? Repetition, environment, a person, a memory?

1. Settle into the body and breath. Notice what is present in the living room of mind consciousness—a feeling, thought, mood, or impulse. Name it gently: “Anger is here,” “Worry is here,” or “Gratitude is here.”
2. Water the seeds of mindfulness. Breathe with what is present and touch it with kind attention. Do not suppress, indulge, or attempt to eliminate it.
3. Discern whether the formation is helpful, harmful, or dependent on context.
4. Looking deeply, investigate what watered it—a memory, conversation, physical sensation, environment, or repeated thought.
5. Breathe and smile. Our understanding of causes and conditions has produced insight and understanding. This is like this because that is like that.
6. This is a happy moment. Be nourished by it.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Practice coming home with mindfulness of body. Pause, breathe, smile—a mindful body means an embodied mind. Notice one moment you called something a “defect,” and try renaming it “not yet skillful.”
2. Mindfulness of Feelings in the Body: notice body cues when an unwholesome feeling is arising. Touch it with the energy of mindfulness before it fully takes over.
3. Practice Mindfulness of Mind: cultivate wholesome states of mind and care for afflictive ones. Learn to discern the difference. Practice Selective Watering.
4. Practice loving speech and deep listening. Are my words from the heart and shared with good intention? Am I actively listening and truly present?
5. Inventory what you are doing right—the times your actions are recovery-oriented and aligned with your values. Include the unwholesome habit energies, words, and actions you did not participate in.
6. Nourish gratitude, recognizing the fruits of recovery and practice.
7. Investigate how you are showing up for life. Take time to touch the wonders and small joys.

Carry Forward I am not my weeds. I am the gardener.

Part Two: Living the Path— Diligence, Joy, and Ease

Third Factor: Diligence

Steps Three, Eight, Nine, and Ten · pp. 63–84

Diligence—*vīrya*—is enthusiastic perseverance, the energy that keeps our actions aligned with our aspiration. This part follows the book's own movement from vow to reconciliation to daily renewal: first living by vow through the Five Mindfulness Trainings, then turning insight into the action of amends, then polishing that aspiration each day. Two studies, each moving through the book's own sections in turn.

Study Five—Living by Vow and the Five Mindfulness Trainings

Echoing Step Three · pp. 63–67

PRACTICE INTENTION To meet the Five Mindfulness Trainings with the tenderness of our heart and cultivate a lived understanding of interbeing and the fruit of spiritual awakening: freedom for ourselves and all beings.

Read pp. 63–67

Reflection

- The Five Mindfulness Trainings are aspirational—a guiding light and a lifelong field of practice. How do they clarify or inform your core values?
- If aspiration points the way, a vow puts it in action. How do your daily choices—what you eat, consume, say, or look away from—align with your core values?
- Each mindfulness training begins with the words, “Aware of the suffering caused by...” Is a commitment to reduce the suffering you cause yourself and others a foundation for intentional living? What other qualities are developed as we put that into action? Take time to clarify a few you want to nourish.

Practice: Needs and Wants Source “True Happiness” (pp. 65–66)—appropriate attention and rediscovering “a wealth already ours: recovery, community, friendship, this breath.” **Purpose** To interrupt the reflex of grasping and notice the abundance already present.

1. Settle into the breath and calm the body.
2. Think of something you want and explore the tug of it. Smile and investigate the edge between need or want, aspiration or desire—the pull to buy or consume.
3. Breathing mindfully, identify something already present that meets a real need—this breath, this body, this sobriety.
4. Am I enough? Do I have enough? Explore the edge between abundance and lack.
5. Let gratitude settle the hunger, even briefly.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Reverence for Life: practice seeing all life as sacred. Where did I choose care over privilege or convenience?
2. True Happiness: Notice one condition for happiness already here—recovery, breath, community—before reaching for anything else.
3. True Love: Before acting on desire, pause and ask: is this rooted in loving care, or in craving and escape?
4. Loving Speech and Deep Listening: Practice speaking from the heart with words that inspire, and listen from the heart, to what is said and may be unsaid.
5. Nourishment and Healing: Cultivate a clear mind, abstaining from all intoxicants, including anger, anxiety, mindless activities, and media.
6. Practice coming home to heart throughout your day, breathing into and through your heart space.
7. Allow the joy of well-being to nourish good intentions and your practice.

Carry Forward I live by vow, not by rule.

Study Six—Reconciliation and Renewal

Steps Eight, Nine, and Ten · pp. 68–84

PRACTICE INTENTION To turn insight into action—reconciliation and daily renewal as an ongoing practice of diligence, not a task completed once.

Reconciliation: Turning the Wheel of Karma

Read pp. 68–70

Reflection

- Is karma fixed or fluid? Does it have Buddha nature? Can it be transformed with understanding and lead to kinder, more ethical behavior and conditions?
- Peacemaking and the process of reconciliation begin within. What fear, shame, or regrets are currently invitations for healing?
- Where does outrage at corruption and injustice risk becoming the same poison it opposes? How do you hold both in your heart and mind?

Practice: Gatha of Atonement Source The Gatha of Atonement, translated by Roshi Taizan Maezumi, chanted by the author in the Zen Peacemakers tradition (p. 69). Purpose To hold the weight of harm caused with care rather than shame—atonement as “at-one-ment.”

1. Sit quietly and settle the body with the breath.
2. Silently or aloud, recite the gatha three times: “All evil karma ever committed by me since of old / on account of my beginningless greed, anger, and ignorance / born of my body, mouth, and mind / now I atone for it all.”
3. Let the words land and penetrate, aware of the heart’s response; also notice the nervous system and mind. What hardens or tightens, what softens or opens?
4. Come back to the heart and aspiration. Reflect on the phrases one by one. Let them penetrate and inform you.
5. Where do beginningless greed, anger, and ignorance land? Explore the edge of self and collective. Are we a drop in the ocean or the ocean in a drop?
6. How do we atone for it all?

Living Amends

Read pp. 70–74

Reflection

- Are the apologies and regrets you have expressed, or the amends you have made, informing your actions and behaviors with others? Are we amending “a” wrong or the nature of the wrong?
- What does the author mean by having a change of heart toward the person we have harmed? How do you encourage that process?
- What is it that tightens the heart and resists forgiveness for ourselves and others? Who or what needs forgiving in your life today? If we can forgive one, can we forgive all? Does that include us?

Practice: Living Amends Source Adapted from “Reconciliation: Turning the Wheel of Karma” and “Living Amends” (pp. 69–74). Purpose Sustained action to turn the wheel of karma. Rather than answering all four at once, return to one question each day this week and let it work on you between sittings—the practice is in the returning, not the resolving.

1. What amends are left undone, and how do they inform your thoughts and behavior today?
2. Are we co-responsible for societal harms and conditions we have not directly created but benefit from?

3. Explore privilege. Do you have benefits you have not considered based on color, sex, and ancestry? What gifts and comforts do you enjoy that are the product of slavery, domination, oppression, and suffering of others?
4. How do we make amends for systemic harms, as part of the system? What does it mean and look like to be an ally to the marginalized and oppressed? How does it inform what you buy, where you shop, or other actions?

Beginning Anew & Righting a Wrong View

Read pp. 74–78

Reflection

- Flower watering recognizes admirable qualities we appreciate, often tied to specific examples. Are you watering your own flowers? What is resisting? Have you thanked yourself for your program and practice?
- “Letting go of right and wrong, true and false, we listen with compassion.” Where is this hardest for you? Is it equally challenging with praise and blame?
- The story of Laurie reveals that “not everything that affects me is about me.” Where might your own wrong view of a past hurt need re-examining?

Practice: Beginning Anew Source “Beginning Anew,” developed by Sister Chan Khong and the Plum Village community (pp. 74–76). Purpose To restore harmony through a structured practice of appreciation, regret, and honest sharing.

1. Flower Watering: Look for flowers to water with friends, loved ones, and strangers. Name a quality you genuinely admire—notice how it is received and how it feels to do.
2. When your flowers are watered, listen with humility and allow it to settle in your body.
3. Expressing Regrets: Hold a feeling of regret for something said, done, or neglected, and let sincerity carry your words. Practice transforming shame and self-condemnation to regret.
4. Sharing a Hurt: Sharing a hurt is embodied and vulnerable, very different from the subtle attack of blame. Speak honestly in the first person, grounded in tenderness and loving speech.
5. Recognizing and sharing old wounds and trauma does not condone our unskillfulness, but may help others understand and support us. Asking for help can be difficult, but it began our path of recovery. Notice what is difficult about asking for help and touch it tenderly with love.

Polishing the Gem

Read pp. 78–81

Reflection

- Volition, aspiration, and diligence: volition moves us forward, aspiration points our direction, diligence is the energy that fuels our vow. Notice the interplay, and how these are working in your life today.
- “Am I sure?” Pause and reflect on this in the course of your day. Is this a perception or a fact? Learn to recognize your views and distinguish the map from the territory. Where am I mistaking a perception for a fact?
- Steps One through Nine are woven into Step Ten. Which earlier Step is quietly asking for your attention again?

Practice: Evening Review Source Pema Chödrön’s end-of-day reflection and Thay’s “Gatha on Impermanence,” both used by the author as a daily Tenth Step practice (pp. 79–81). Purpose To close the day with honest inventory, without collapsing into either pride or shame.

1. Take inventory at the end of the day, reflecting on your thoughts, words, and actions. What was skillful, what can be improved?
2. Practice Pema’s reflection: If you fulfilled your aspiration even once, rejoice in that. If you went against it, rejoice that you can see it clearly and are no longer in ignorance.

3. Set an intention and refresh it, reciting these words: “This day is ending; our lives are shorter. / Let us look carefully at what we have done. / Let us practice diligently, putting our whole heart into the path of awakening. / Let us live deeply in each moment, / free from our afflictions and aware of impermanence, / so that life does not drift away meaninglessly.”

Everyday Zen

Read pp. 81–84

Reflection

- “The Steps are not completed; they are metabolized.” Notice where you are pausing, surrendering, restoring, turning it over, inventorying, and living the Steps without formally thinking about them. See how they have shaped your behavior, and freshen your active relationship to them, individually and collectively.
- Where am I sleepwalking on automatic pilot? Find or write a gatha to help you wake up in the small moments of life, like walking to the car or watering a plant.
- “Diligence is not always long periods of meditation; sometimes it’s the willingness to pause and begin again. And again.” Is beginning again a joy or a burden? Are disturbances and distractions an invitation for that?

Practice: Waking Up Source Thay’s gatha “Waking Up,” from Present Moment, Wonderful Moment, recited each morning by the author (p. 83). Purpose To vow, at the start of the day, to live fully and see all beings—including yourself—with eyes of compassion.

1. Before rising, silently recite: “Waking up this morning, I smile. / Twenty-four brand new hours are before me. / I vow to live fully in each moment, / And view all beings with eyes of compassion.”
2. Practice coming home to the breath and the wonders of life with gathas. Pick a few and make them part of your life.
3. Install a mindfulness bell app on your phone or computer. Practice mindful breathing when it sounds, or notice what is resisting. When attention slips, simply begin again. Am I truly present?

Seven Days of Practice

1. Practice the Gatha of Atonement, letting the words land without shame or defense.
2. Recognize privilege and use it to benefit all beings.
3. Practice Flower Watering: name one thing you admire in someone today, specifically and aloud.
4. Ask “Am I sure?” of one assumption before the day is over.
5. Take an evening inventory: where did you meet your aspiration, and where did you not?
6. Choose one ordinary action and make it a gatha—a pause, a breath, a vow.
7. Practice small acts of kindness and compassion. They are as karmically significant as grand gestures. Diligence, awareness, and understanding are turning the wheel of our karma.

Carry Forward I begin again. And again.

Fourth Factor: Joy

pp. 85–99 · No Steps are directly cited in this chapter

Joy—*pīti*—is the rising, energizing companion of happiness, not a reward saved for the end of the path. This part follows the book’s own movement: first distinguishing joy from happiness and pleasure, then widening joy into eating meditation, grief, love, and craving, then closing with the surrenders that let joy in. Unlike the other chapters, Joy names no Steps directly—so these two studies are organized entirely around the book’s own sections rather than a Step sequence.

Study Seven—Joy, Happiness, and Pleasure

pp. 85–92

PRACTICE INTENTION To learn the difference between joy, happiness, and pleasure, and let joy become an everyday companion rather than a reward saved for later.

Joy, Happiness, and Pleasure

Read pp. 85–89

Reflection

- Joy rises like a wave; happiness rests like a calm shore. Where do you notice the difference between the two in your own body? • “It’s like licking honey off a razor blade.” Where has pleasure led you into craving rather than nourishment? • The author’s Dharma name means True Ocean of Joy. The elders saw joy not as the absence of suffering but the capacity to care for it. Where is that true for you? • Gil Fronsda’s affirmation is a series of “Yes” statements. What would your own “yes” sound like today?

Practice: The Power of Yes Source Gil Fronsda’s “Yes” affirmation, quoted by the author to describe joy as a feeling of affirmation (pp. 85–86). **Purpose** To practice yes as a posture toward the present moment, rather than resistance.

1. Settle into the breath. 2. Silently or aloud, offer: “Yes—to the breath. Yes—to this moment. Yes—to being fully present.” 3. Notice where the body resists saying yes today. 4. Let one “yes” extend to something difficult, without needing to like it.

Both/And

Read pp. 88–89

Reflection

- “Joy and sorrow are not opposites. The heart is not binary.” When have you experienced joy and sorrow at the same time? What changed when you allowed both to be present? • Brother Phap Dung saw beauty without denying the mess. Where might a loving pause reveal something you could not see while rushing to fix the mess? • “In a real sense, his death became a rebirth for me.” Has a loss or painful change ever opened an unexpected doorway in you? Is there something new growing alongside what still hurts?

Practice: Both/And Source “Both/And” (pp. 88–89)—joy and sorrow held together rather than resolved into one or the other. **Purpose** To practice holding grief and joy, mess and beauty, loss and gratitude together, without asking either to leave first.

1. Make Room for Both: Pause and complete two sentences without reconciling them—“There is sorrow in me because...” and “There is also joy in me because...” Place a hand on your heart and take three gentle breaths. Let both truths belong. 2. Look with Loving Eyes: When something goes wrong—a spill, a broken object, a disrupted plan—notice your first reaction and pause before rushing to fix it. Ask: is the rush to fix it feeding shame, or love? You do not have to pretend the mess is good—simply notice whether tenderness, humor, or unexpected beauty is also present. 3. Remember What Remains: Bring to mind someone or something you have lost. Let yourself feel what hurts, without forcing it to change. Then recall one color, sound, gesture, or moment of happiness connected to what you loved. Notice whether grief and gratitude can rest together.

4. Taste the Both/And: Before a meal, pause to recognize the goodness of the food before you, and the labor and lives behind it. Take the first bite in silence, receiving it with gratitude while remembering that joy does not require looking away from suffering.

These practices preserve an important distinction: “both/and” does not mean finding a positive side to every tragedy. It means allowing beauty, gratitude, or joy to arise without asking grief to leave first.

Eating Meditation

Read pp. 89–92

Reflection

- How many bites of a meal do you truly taste before habit takes over? What might help you savor the experience of eating?
- What effects do your food choices have on other beings and the Earth? Is there one choice you could make with intention and compassion—not from guilt, but from care?
- Food becomes body, and what the body releases continues its transformation. What does this cycle teach you about interbeing and your relationship with the Earth?

Practice: The Five Contemplations Source The Five Contemplations before eating, in the Plum Village tradition (pp. 90–91). Purpose To bring reverence, humility, moderation, compassion, and aspiration into an ordinary meal.

1. Before eating, pause and recite silently: “This food is a gift of the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work.” Allow this web of support to feed your spirit.
2. “May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive this food.” Eat with appreciation and honor the effort that brought this meal to you.
3. “May we recognize and transform unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed, and learn to eat with moderation.” Allow this food to nourish your recovery and spiritual awakening along with your body.
4. “May we keep our compassion alive by eating in such a way that reduces the suffering of living beings... and heals and preserves our precious planet.” As this food impacts my life, I impact the world and all living beings.
5. “We accept this food so that we may nurture our brotherhood and sisterhood, build our Sangha, and nourish our ideal of serving all living beings.” Let the meal connect you to community, not only to yourself.
6. Eat the first few bites in silence, tasting fully before habit takes over.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Notice the difference between a moment of joy—rising, energizing—and a moment of happiness—steady, quiet.
2. Practice the Power of Yes with one difficult moment today.
3. When something breaks or goes wrong, pause before reacting and look for what’s beautiful in the mess.
4. Reflect on the Five Contemplations and try to practice eating meditation at least one meal a day.
5. Notice where greed, gluttony, and craving may be blurring together today.
6. Ask: is this joy a reward I’m waiting for, or a companion already here?
7. Let both joy and sorrow be true in the same moment, without needing to resolve which is real.

Carry Forward Joy is not the absence of suffering. It is the capacity to care for it.

Study Eight—Boundless Love, Letting Go, and the Gift in the Wound

pp. 92–99

PRACTICE INTENTION To let love expand beyond its object, to turn toward what we cling to rather than away from it, and to find what surrender makes room for.

Boundless Love

Read pp. 92–94

Reflection

- “Grief contains non-grief elements.” Can you hold grief in Both/And awareness and touch the wholesome love within it? • How can you honor the love without negating or bypassing the suffering? Where does your love want to go now? What action might give it expression? • Has the sorrow you thought was yours alone ever opened into something shared that connected you with others?

Practice: Love as Verb Source “Boundless Love” (pp. 92–94)—“Love is both noun and verb. As a noun, it’s a feeling. As a verb, it’s an action.” Purpose To practice love as something done, not only felt.

1. Bring to mind someone you love, present or gone.
2. Breathing in, let love be present. Let it fill your heart and nourish it. Breathing out, smile.
3. Ask, “How does this love want to move through me?” Choose an action that gives it expression today—an act of kindness, care, generosity, or presence.
4. Pause and feel the goodness of love expressed; shared and multiplied rather than diminished or spent.
5. Vow to cultivate and share this goodness for the benefit of all beings, giving love life through your actions and allowing it to grow without bounds.

Objects of Mind

Read pp. 94–96

Reflection

- “The pattern of obsession remains even as the object changes.” When one attachment falls away, what does your mind reach for next? Do you recognize a pattern beneath changing objects? • When something is occupying a great deal of your attention, ask yourself: “What am I really craving? Is this worthy of my energy and attention?” • “Turning toward the experience of irritation rather than its object is the path of healing.” When you are irritated or resentful, what changes when you turn toward the experience within you rather than remaining focused on its object?

Practice: What Is the Mind Holding? Source “Objects of Mind,” the Fourth Establishment of Mindfulness (pp. 94–95). Purpose To recognize what is occupying the mind and investigate it with curiosity rather than judgment.

1. Notice one thing pulling at your attention right now—an urge, an irritation, a scroll. Pause, breathe mindfully, and allow the body to settle in stillness.
2. Notice what pulls your attention from the breath, the object of mind. Name it—planning, remembering, wanting, worrying, resenting, fantasizing. Do not push it away or follow its story. Simply recognize, “The mind is holding this.”

3. Notice how you are relating to the object. Are you grasping for it, resisting it, fearing it, or trying to control it? Where do you feel this in the body? 4. Turn your attention from the object to the experience within you. Ask, “What am I truly longing for—relief, safety, belonging, connection, recognition, or control?” 5. Ask, “Is this object worthy of the energy and attention I am giving it? Does holding it lead toward freedom or deeper entanglement?” 6. Throughout the day, return to breath and to four words: object, relationship, longing, choice. Notice how the objects change while the underlying pattern may remain. Choose the response that leads toward freedom.

Joyfully Letting Go

Read pp. 95–98

Reflection

- “The only thing you need to change is everything.” What is one thing you’ve been unwilling to put on that list?
- Is there a lesser happiness you are holding onto that prevents you from receiving a deeper one? What makes it difficult to release?
- What role, achievement, habit, or identity have you mistaken for who you are? What potential might be realized if you loosened your grip? Where might reinvention become a joyful invitation rather than merely necessary?

Practice: Joyfully Letting Go Source “Joyfully Letting Go” (pp. 95–98)—“Joy often lives on the other side of release.” The recited verse in step 4 is Dhammapada 21.290. Purpose To experience letting go not as punishment or deprivation, but as an opening toward greater freedom and joy.

1. Bring to mind something you are holding tightly—a habit, craving, possession, role, belief, or image of yourself.
2. Ask, “What happiness does this promise me?” Notice what it gives you, or once gave you, without judging yourself for wanting it.
3. Ask, “What does holding on cost me?” Is it feeding fear, pride, or lack, or nourishing freedom, creativity, or potential?
4. Quietly recite: “If by renouncing a lesser happiness one may realize a greater happiness, let the wise one renounce the lesser, having regard for the greater.”
5. Letting go, just for a moment, notice what opens with the release—freedom, relief, connection, discovery, or simply space.
6. As you move through the day, bring surrender into the small moments of attachment. Practice taking joyful steps into the unlimited potential of what you cannot yet know.

A Gift in the Wound

Read pp. 98–99

Reflection

- “What if nothing needed to be fixed?” Where do you assume a painful ending must mean failure?
- “Feelings are real, but the stories we attach to them are not.” What story does a difficult feeling tell you? What else is also true?
- What might change if you trusted that nothing—and no one—outside you is required to make you whole?

Practice: Breathing with Loneliness Source “A Gift in the Wound” (pp. 98–100)—“Whether feelings become poison or medicine depends on how we relate to them.” Purpose To meet a difficult feeling with compassion, distinguish it from the story surrounding it, and discover what else is present.

1. Ground and settle in the body and breath. 2. Bring awareness to a difficult feeling that is present now—loneliness, grief, fear, anger, or regret. Choose something you can hold without becoming overwhelmed.
3. Notice the story attaching itself to the feeling. Breathing in, name it gently: “Loneliness is here.” Breathing out, offer companionship: “I am here for you, my loneliness.”
4. Let go of the story for a moment and feel the experience in your body. Notice its weight, temperature, movement, or shape. Neither resist it nor feed it.
5. Let it arise, remain, and pass, like a mother cradling a crying child.
6. Recall one true thing from earlier today that isn’t this feeling—a laugh, a connection, a moment of ease.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Loving Action: practice love as a verb with small actions that give love expression.
2. Investigate Desire: notice what your mind reaches for and ask, “What am I really longing for?”
3. Turn Inward: when irritation arises, turn toward what is disturbed within you rather than the object of irritation.
4. Choose the Greater Happiness: release a lesser pleasure in service of a deeper freedom or joy.
5. Befriend a Difficult Feeling: when loneliness or another painful feeling arises, breathe with it—neither resisting nor feeding it. Seeing and holding it is already healing.
6. Hold Both: let one grief and one joy sit side by side today, without pushing or pulling. Both true.
7. Acceptance, Not Fixing: what if nothing here needs to be fixed? Notice what becomes possible when acceptance comes before action.

Carry Forward Joy lives on the other side of release.

Fifth Factor: Ease

pp. 101–121 · Step Eleven is the chapter's primary citation

Ease is not the reward waiting at the end of effort—it is effort's companion, the settling of body and mind that lets practice sustain itself. This part follows the book's own movement: from the breath itself, into work and rest, into the Eleventh Step's prayer and silence, then outward into loving-kindness, walking, and the disruptions that ease must finally include rather than exclude.

Study Nine—Effort, Ease, and the Breath

pp. 101–110

PRACTICE INTENTION To let effort and ease work together rather than against each other—trying softly, resting fully, and discovering that ease is not the reward at the end of practice but the ground it stands on.

Effort and Ease & In/Out, Deep/Slow Meditation

Read pp. 101–105

Reflection

- Is it easier to notice ease or stress in your body? What does ease feel like in your body? Can we train ourselves to notice and nourish ease?
- What is the difference, in your experience, between guiding your attention and trying to control your mind?
- How do “Easy Does It” and “One Day at a Time” connect with Present Moment, Wonderful Moment, for you?

Practice: In/Out, Deep/Slow Source Thich Nhat Hanh’s five-phrase meditation from *Be Free Where You Are*, the foundation of the author’s daily practice (pp. 102–104). **Purpose** To let the breath move through five pairs of words, each guiding body and mind further into ease.

1. Breathing in, silently say “in.” Breathing out, silently say “out.” In, out.
2. When breathing naturally deepens, breathing in say “deep,” breathing out say “slow.” Deep, slow.
3. Breathing in, acknowledge calm. Breathing out, nourish ease. Calm, ease.
4. Breathing in, smile. Breathing out, release. Smile, release.
5. Breathing in, present moment. Breathing out, wonderful moment. Present moment, wonderful moment.
6. Bring these phrases into your day and notice the shift from being swept along to presence.

Working Meditation & Lazy Days

Read pp. 105–107

Reflection

- Whose time is it when you are at work, waiting for a plane to board, or a red light? If these were the last minutes of our life, could you show up with freedom and gratitude? Is anything more important than your peace and happiness in the present moment?
- “Busy as a bee” carries approval; laziness is often an accusation. Do you feel guilt or shame when taking a nap or enjoying a lazy day? Where does your sense of worth become tied to productivity?
- The song “And When I Rise” pictures rising joyfully like a bird, falling gracefully like a leaf, working wholeheartedly like a bee. Which line names something you need more of this week?

Practice: Working Meditation Source Working meditation in the Plum Village tradition, in which mindful presence and care are valued as much as the results of the task (pp. 105–107). **Purpose** To approach an ordinary task without hurrying, bringing wholehearted attention, ease, and care to each step.

1. Choose a simple task such as washing dishes, folding laundry, cleaning, or making the bed.
2. Before you begin, pause for three mindful breaths. Let go of the urge to finish.
3. Approach it with loving care, as an act of service for the benefit of all beings.
4. Ask, “What is there to enjoy here?” Notice each movement and sensation, the air and the Earth, and the goodness of your intention.
5. When you notice distraction or hurrying, let it be a mindfulness bell rather than a failure. Come back to the breath and the heart of your aspiration.

6. When the task is complete, pause and smile before moving on. This is a happy moment—take time to enjoy it.

The Eleventh Step

Read pp. 107–110

Reflection

- What has prayer meant to you at different times in your life? Has it felt transactional, comforting, uncomfortable, or something else? How does Eleventh Step prayer differ from your previous understanding or experience of prayer?
- The chapter describes prayer and meditation meeting in silence, where presence itself becomes prayer. What does “conscious contact” mean in your own experience?
- What might change if you understood God, the Divine, or Buddha as awakened nature—your capacity for awareness, healing, understanding, and change?

Practice: Conscious Contact Source “The Eleventh Step” (pp. 107–110)—the movement from transactional prayer toward prayer and meditation meeting in silence. Purpose To practice a form of prayer that asks for nothing, only presence.

1. Sit comfortably and take a few mindful breaths, allowing the body and mind to settle.
2. Who breathes? Bear witness to the breath and the cycle of respiration.
3. What power animates the lungs, the heart, the awareness of awareness?
4. Touch the miracle of life—the miraculous confluence of phenomena in each breath.
5. Treasure the gift of sight, of sound, of perception, and cognition. Explore them in turn. Recognize the sacred in the mundane.
6. Ask, “What is my highest calling today?” How can you honor it?

Seven Days of Practice

1. Find moments throughout the day to return to your breath. Practice In/Out, Deep/Slow—even one pair of the words, even if just for one minute.
2. Notice moments when you push instead of ease into a task, and soften.
3. Carry a song in your heart as you work and play this week.
4. Practice Right Laziness by making unscheduled time for spacious rest and creative imagination, without needing to earn it.
5. Notice whether your prayer is transactional—seeking a result—or opening you to presence, guidance, and wise action.
6. Pause and investigate, “Am I really present?” early and often.
7. When you fall short, be like a leaf: fall gracefully, returning with care instead of shame.

Carry Forward Ease comes from nonresistance.

Study Ten—Loving Kindness, Silence, and Walking Toward Ease

pp. 110–121

PRACTICE INTENTION To let ease widen outward—into how we wish others well, how we hold silence together, how we walk, and how we meet what unsettles us.

Mettā Meditation (Loving Kindness)

Read pp. 110–111

Reflection

- How does mettā blur the line between prayer and meditation for you? What feels familiar, inviting, or uncomfortable about offering wishes of well-being?
- Is it easier to extend kindness to others than to yourself? What arises—or resists—when you receive the same goodwill you readily offer someone you love?
- What might it mean to offer goodwill to someone who has caused suffering? How can loving kindness coexist with truth, accountability, and healthy boundaries?

Practice: Mettā Meditation Source The loving-kindness meditation adapted by Thich Nhat Hanh, offered first toward oneself (pp. 110–111). **Purpose** To offer unconditional goodwill, beginning with yourself, before extending it outward.

Repeat each verse three times, slowly. Notice any resistance and touch that with your words, as well.

1. Settle into the breath. Find your heart space and breathe into and through it.
2. With all the energy of your heart, silently offer to yourself: “May I be peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit. May I be safe and free from injury.”
3. “May I be free from anger, unwholesome states of mind like fear and worries. May I learn to look at myself with eyes of understanding and love.”
4. “May I be able to recognize and touch seeds of joy and happiness in myself. May I be able to live fresh, solid, and free.”
5. “May I be free from attachment and aversion but not fall into indifference.”
6. When ready, extend these same phrases to someone you love, someone neutral, and someone who has caused you suffering. Notice what you notice: resistance or opening, lightness or heaviness, warmth or cool. Bring your attention back to the heart, over and over, widening the field of goodwill.

Noble Silence

Read pp. 111–113

Reflection

- “Silence becomes a container for deep listening and reflection.” What has silence revealed to you that words could not? What can be said without words? Is mindful presence enough?
- Noble silence deepens through ease rather than effort. Notice the impulse to speak, comment, or explain. Hold it tenderly and smile. What might that impulse be seeking?
- Recovery teaches the healing power of sharing; Noble Silence offers a complementary truth. How can you discern when silence is spacious and restorative—and when it is withdrawal, avoidance, or fear?

Practice: A Period of Noble Silence Source “Noble Silence” (pp. 111–113)—silence as a shared gift, not a punishment or an absence. **Purpose** To notice the impulse to speak and let it pass, without needing to fill space.

1. Choose a period for noble silence—a meal, a walk, an hour, or part of a morning. Let others know if needed.

2. Set aside conversation and unnecessary communication. When possible, pause messages, media, reading, and other forms of mental consumption.
3. When the urge to comment or react arises, notice it and let it pass without acting on it. Let a smile, gesture, or quiet presence be enough.
4. Listen to what remains—your breath, bodily sensations, the wind, surrounding sounds, a quieter voice, the movement of the mind.
5. Attend to the concert of life, the rhythm and music of small sounds and the environment. Feel the groove.
6. Afterward, ask: what did I almost say that didn't need saying? What did the silence reveal, and how does it inform the conversations to come?

Walking Meditation

Read pp. 113–117

Reflection

- As you walk, where is your attention? With your steps, or somewhere ahead? Explore the line between awareness of your environment and distraction.
- On Vulture Peak, shifting attention from the foot that was working to the foot that was resting transformed the author's experience. Where in your life are you focused only on effort and overlooking what is resting, supporting, or carrying you?
- The poem says peace is not the destination; "peace is the walk." What peace, happiness, or freedom are you postponing until you arrive somewhere else?

Practice: Walking Meditation Source The walking meditation gatha and the "in, in, in / out, out, out" practice, both from the book (pp. 113–116). Purpose To let each step be the arrival, not the means to one.

1. Find a stretch of ground, indoors or out, and walk a bit slower than usual.
2. Breathing in, silently note "in, in, in" with each step; breathing out, note "out, out, out." You may want to count the steps with each breath—the numbers don't need to match.
3. Caress the ground with every mindful step, planting seeds of ease, goodwill, and freedom.
4. Offer the gatha: "I touch the Earth, the Earth touches me."
5. Pause to enjoy a view or object of beauty while staying with your breath.
6. Smile and release. Walking is the joy; walking is the peace.

At Ease with Unease

Read pp. 117–121

Reflection

- When illness required the author to release music, service, and familiar roles, the question arose: "Who was I now?" Which roles, abilities, or activities have become part of your identity? Who are you when they change or fall away?
- The baby's cries shifted from disturbance to something closer to joy once the author's meditation steadied enough to hold it. What people, places, and things do you resist as not belonging? What shifts when you allow them to be part of the moment?
- "Ease is often seen as a reward, but in practice, it is the path." Do you postpone ease until circumstances change or a difficulty is resolved? What would it mean to bring ease to the difficulty itself?

Practice: Making Music from the Noise Source "At Ease with Unease" (pp. 117–118)—the improvising musician's view that "everything belongs." Purpose To let an unwanted sound or disruption become part of the music instead of an interruption to it.

1. Settle into the expansive moment, grounded in your body.
2. Allow a moment of manageable unease—an itch, irritation, interruption, limitation, or uncertainty—to enter your awareness.

3. What sounds, sensations, and emotions are present? Distinguish them from the judgments and stories forming around them.
4. Widen your attention. What else belongs to this moment—the ground beneath you, a caring voice, something beautiful, or the simple fact that you are breathing?
5. Breathe and imagine the moment as part of a larger piece of music. How might you meet its tension, silence, or dissonance as a creative improviser rather than a victim?
6. Stay grounded in your breath, and let ease include the disruption rather than exclude it.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Bring the phrase “May I be well, may I be happy” into your activities. Try to mean it: “May I really be well. May I really be happy.” Silently share it with others, including strangers.
2. Practice a period of Noble Silence each day—even part of a meal, or a walk.
3. Practice walking meditation in casual moments, walking to the kitchen, car, or bathroom. Walk with ease, noting “in, in, in” and “out, out, out.”
4. Cultivate ease by creating moments of rest—between emails, bites of food, or ordinary pauses in the day.
5. Listen to the concert of life without naming or commenting on it. Let an unwanted sound or interruption become part of the music rather than a disruption.
6. Smile and release. Ask, “Is ease a reward I’m waiting for, or a path I could practice now?”

Carry Forward Everything belongs.

Part Three: Deepening and Embodying—Concentration and Equanimity

Sixth Factor: Concentration

pp. 123–148 · no direct Twelve Step citation in this chapter

Samādhi—concentration—is sustained mindfulness: the mind calmly abiding with its object of attention until, as the book puts it, attention no longer rests on the breath but rests in it. This part follows the chapter’s own movement: from the quality of attention itself, through the breath and the dhyānas, into the wisdom teachings concentration makes possible—the Three Dharma Seals and the Three Doors of Liberation.

Study Eleven—Right Concentration and the Gathering of the Mind

pp. 123–133

PRACTICE INTENTION To shift concentration from something we strive for to something we arrive at—gathering scattered attention until we no longer watch the breath, or the moment, but rest inside it.

Mindfulness, Concentration, and Insight

Read pp. 123–125

Reflection

- The practice invites an uncovering rather than striving or mastering. How does this change the way you relate to progress, achievement, or “doing it right”? • “At first, we visit it. Then we climb aboard. Eventually, we live inside it.” Which teaching or recovery principle has moved from an idea into a lived experience for you? • How does samādhi—collected, harmonized energy of mind—differ from the strained or effortful concentration you may have learned in school or at work?

Practice: Resting In Source Adapted from the book’s own account of concentration deepening: observer and observed, the whole breath from beginning to end, and “attention no longer rests on the breath—it rests in the breath” (pp. 124–125). **Purpose** To move from watching an object of concentration to dwelling within it.

1. Sit in a comfortable upright posture and bring your attention to the breath. Simply recognize, “There is a breath here.”
2. Notice there is a you, the observer, and the breath, the object of attention.
3. When mindfulness deepens, our attention grows more nuanced, and we discern there is an in-breath and an out-breath. Let the body breathe without interference or control.
4. As concentration develops, stay with the whole in-breath, from beginning to end, and the whole out-breath, the same way. Relax into it, allowing concentration to deepen without effort.
5. As the breath deepens and slows, allow your attention to rest “in” the breath. The breather and the breathed are one.
6. When your attention drifts, notice what pulled it away: thought, sound, sensation, taste, smell, or sight. Smile and gently return—aware of breath, riding the breath, resting in breath, again and again.

Right Concentration & May All Be Music

Read pp. 125–129

Reflection

- “Concentration itself is neutral;” the question is what it serves. Where is your attention most concentrated in daily life, and does that focus lead toward freedom or reinforce compulsion and separation? • “Are you at a meeting, or are you in it?” Where else in your life do you show up in body but not in attention? • “When the present moment feels boring or lacking, it is a mindfulness bell.” What becomes available when you meet boredom with curiosity rather than seeking stimulation?

Practice: Everyday Music Source Adapted from “May All Be Music,” including the reflections on 4’33” and “pass the parcel,” and closing with a line from Larry Ward’s poem “Enter Your Life,” quoted in the chapter (pp. 126–129). **Purpose** To practice radical presence with whatever sound or moment is actually here, without filtering it into wanted or unwanted.

1. Choose an ordinary stretch of time—a commute, a chore, a wait—where you’d normally reach for a distraction.
2. Let all of your senses open: sounds near and far, silence between them, the color, shapes, and textures of the world around you, the smell, taste, and touch of the air itself.
3. Notice the impulse to judge: like or dislike, hot or cold, noise or music, interesting or boring. Let the judgment pass without following it.
4. Let the moment be unwrapped like a gift, one layer at a time, with curiosity.
5. Look with the Buddha Eye: how did all of this come to be? What am I practicing in this moment, and what conditions am I creating?
6. Touch the great mystery. If this were your last day, how would you show up for it? “Cross the lake of life’s great mystery like a swan, embodying grace, embodying peace, embodying compassion, as you head toward the other shore.”

Gathering the Mind

Read pp. 129–130

Reflection

- What is the difference between dulling the mind through suppression or escape and gathering the mind through concentration? How do you recognize each in your own experience?
- The author found long tones—and later the breath—boring because he wanted movement and results. Where does impatience with foundational practice keep you from entering more deeply into an experience?
- Counting the breath is a skillful means, not a goal or measure of achievement. When have you mistaken a tool, mental state, or milestone for the purpose of a practice?

Practice: Counting Home Source Adapted from the breath-counting and In/Out, Deep/Slow material, with the step-counting convention from Walking Meditation adapted to sitting meditation (pp. 129–130). Purpose A skillful means to gather scattered attention, not a goal to master.

1. Sit comfortably in an upright posture and allow the body to settle. Feel the contact between your body and the ground or chair.
2. Let the body breathe naturally. Silently count each inhale, beginning with “one” and continuing to five.
3. If attention wanders or you lose count, smile and start again at one without judgment.
4. As attention gathers, enter the experience of breathing. Feel the lungs, ribcage, shoulders, belly, and the temperature of the air.
5. Shift from counting breaths to noting the duration of each in-breath and out-breath. Find a natural pulse and note: “in, in, in” throughout the inhale and “out, out, out” throughout the exhale.
6. Bring this into your day as a skillful means to dwell with the breath in your activities.

The Dhyānas

Read pp. 130–133

Reflection

- Siddhartha mastered deep states of concentration but discovered that they alone did not end suffering. What is the difference between experiencing a peaceful mental state and developing liberating insight?
- The dhyānas arise when conditions support them and become strained when we try to force or recapture them. When has pursuing a particular feeling or experience prevented you from being present with what was actually happening?
- The needs of the Red Ackies became clear only when the author stopped projecting what he knew and listened without an agenda. Where might your assumptions be preventing you from seeing what is actually present?
- “Recovery is no longer something we do; it’s the way we live.” Where do you notice that shift?

Practice: Listening Without Agenda

Source Adapted from the Red Ackies story and “Don’t try to force or recapture them” (pp. 132–133). Purpose To loosen assumptions and allow clear seeing to arise through unhurried attention.

1. Choose something you can observe quietly: an animal, plant, natural setting, familiar object, or unfolding situation.
2. Settle into your breath and body. Let attention rest gently on what is before you.
3. Notice thoughts, names, explanations, and expectations as they arise. Acknowledge them without following them, then return to observation.
4. Attend closely to detail, movement, stillness, pattern, and change. Let what you observe show itself without requiring it to conform to what you already know.
5. Remain without searching for an insight or trying to produce a meditative state. Allow attention to become steady in its own time.
6. Afterward, ask, “What became visible when I listened without an agenda?” Receive whatever arose, then let the experience go without trying to recapture it.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Practice Resting In: shift from watching the breath to resting inside it.
2. Name one refuge in your life. Are you visiting it, aboard it, or living inside it?
3. Notice one moment you label boring. Treat it as a mindfulness bell and bring curiosity.
4. Practice Everyday Music: let one ordinary stretch of time be heard, not filtered.
5. Practice Counting Home: count five in-breaths, then shift from counting breaths to the felt duration of each breath.
6. Notice where you crave results rather than settling into the process. Release the result and fully enjoy what is here.
7. In one conversation, listen with your whole body and without an agenda. Let understanding matter more than preparing your response.

Carry Forward However you arrive, you’ve arrived.

Study Twelve—The Three Dharma Seals and the Three Doors of Liberation

pp. 133–148

PRACTICE INTENTION To let concentration ripen into insight—seeing impermanence, nonself, and the unconditioned directly, then stepping through the doors of emptiness, signlessness, and aimlessness they open.

Impermanence

Read pp. 133–136

Reflection

- The text says that knowing about impermanence is different from “seeing with the eyes of impermanence.” Viewing the world that way, whom might you treat with greater tenderness today? • Impermanence means loss is inevitable, but it also makes recovery, healing, and awakening possible. How is your relationship with impermanence shifting with awareness and understanding? • “My forgiveness, too, is impermanent... the resurfacing of resentment may be a gift in disguise.” Where has a feeling you thought you’d resolved returned, and what might it be offering you this time? • We sometimes freeze a single moment “as if it defines the whole movie.” What present difficulty have you mistaken for a permanent condition?

Practice: The Rhythm of Birth and Death Source Adapted from “following the breath is a direct encounter with impermanence... arising, being, fading, and returning” (p. 135). Purpose To meet impermanence directly, in the body, rather than as an idea.

1. Settle into the body and ease into the breath.
2. Follow the full breath cycle: notice the arising of the in-breath, its fullness, its fading into the out-breath, and its return.
3. Let each breath be a small birth and death—nothing to hold onto, nothing to push away.
4. When a thought, feeling, or craving arises, apply the same lens: arising, being, fading, and passing.
5. If something painful feels frozen—a resentment, feeling, or memory—notice the sensations it produces and remind yourself, “This is just the way it is right now—a fleeting moment in my life.” Gently ask whether it, too, might be allowed to move. If it feels overwhelming, change your focus and return to the safety of the breath and body.
6. Close by naming where you fear or resist change—a happiness you don’t want to end, or a resentment you are unwilling to forgive. Silently acknowledge, “This, too, is impermanent,” without needing to fix it.

Nonself

Read pp. 136–137

Reflection

- Nonself doesn’t mean that we do not exist or that our pain does not matter. What fears or misunderstandings arise when you hear the teaching of nonself? • The obsession to use “isn’t ‘mine.’ It’s a visitor, a weather pattern moving through.” The same is true with our feelings. What shifts when you touch afflictive emotions like fear, shame, grief, and unworthiness with this insight? • “When we relapse, we are not a failed self. We are a process in need of different conditions.” Recovery happens through causes and conditions, as well. How does this reframe land in your body compared to the self-judgment or pride you may be used to?

Practice: Who Is Breathing? Source Verbatim from the text’s own inquiry: “Who is breathing? Who is aware?” (p. 137).

Purpose A direct meditative inquiry into nonself—not a concept to accept but an experience to have.

1. Sit quietly and settle into the breath. When mindfulness and concentration are present, ask: “Who is breathing?”
2. Don’t answer with a concept. Simply look, investigate, and notice what is actually here—sensation, air, movement, awareness, and the living exchange of gases supporting the breath.
3. Ask: “Who is aware of this breath?”
4. Look with gentle curiosity. Is there a fixed “one” behind awareness, or are the thoughts, feelings, and sensations—influenced by sensory experience—continually arising and dissolving?
5. Whose curiosity, goodness, peace, or thought is this? Zoom out and notice the causes and conditions that allow it to arise, be noticed, and pass.
6. Let the question remain open rather than resolved. Notice the pull toward resolution and see whether you can rest in the uncertainty. Bring this into your day. What makes one thing funny or interesting to you but not to someone else? What conditions shape that response?

Nirvana & Suchness

Read pp. 138–140

Reflection

- “Nirvana isn’t the fireworks of a peak experience; it’s the peace of surrender, the coolness of abstinence, the stillness of ashes after the fire goes out.” Where have you tasted that kind of quiet peace, rather than an exciting high?
- “Nirvana is unconditioned. It is the one thing not dependent on causes and conditions.” Service without recognition, peace without control, and love without needing it returned are described as tastes of the unconditioned. What do you believe must be “just right” before you can be at peace? What might it mean for peace to be available without those conditions?
- Suchness describes coming home to the wholeness of life as it is, without seeking someone or something to complete us. Where are you looking for a fix, and what becomes possible when you remember that you are already whole?

Practice: The Fire Going Out Source Adapted from the nirvana passage on fire, burning, and the unconditioned (pp. 138–139). Purpose To notice the difference between chasing relief and resting in what’s already unconditioned.

1. Bring to mind a recent moment of manageable craving or striving—for relief, approval, an outcome. 2. Notice the burning quality: the running, the wanting, the reaching. Where do you feel it in your body?
3. Notice what feeds the fire—a thought, fantasy, fear, memory, or demand that life be different. Without fighting it, stop adding the fuel.
4. Ask: “What is here, right now, that is without need or want?”
5. Rest in the goodness and fullness of the moment—the spark of life, the beating heart, love without demand.
6. Notice: has the fire gone out, or only quieted? Either is fine. Just notice.

Moments of Wholeness

Read pp. 140–142

Reflection

- Hank and Lily’s care became part of how the author later cared for Ham and his parents. Whose kindness or tenderness lives on in the way you care for others?
- The author could offer Ham unconditional care but wondered whether he could treat himself with the same kindness. Is compassion easier to offer others than yourself? Who or what might provide a point of entry into self-compassion?
- “Every moment of our lives is preparing us for the next.” Looking back, what experience prepared you to meet something you could not have anticipated? Are you wholly ready for this breath and whatever life offers today?

Practice: A Point of Entry Source Adapted from “Moments of Wholeness”—allowing the care we have received and offered to become a doorway into caring for ourselves (pp. 140–142). Purpose To recognize that love and care do not belong to one person but continue through us.

1. Settle into the breath and feel the support of the body beneath you.
2. Bring to mind someone you have cared for with tenderness, patience, or acceptance. Remember how naturally your heart responded.
3. Notice how that care feels in your body—its warmth, softness, steadiness, or strength.
4. Bring awareness to a part of yourself that is hurting, ashamed, frightened, or in need of care.
5. If loving yourself directly feels difficult, let the person you love become a point of entry: “I can care for the part of them that lives in me.”
6. Widen the field. Recognize the care of ancestors, teachers, sponsors, friends, and communities continuing through you. Ask, “How can I embody that care today?”

The Three Doors of Liberation

Read pp. 142–148

Reflection

- “Nothing exists without relationship or support.” Where in your life or recovery can you see how you are made of the people who helped you?
- Thay taught, “Where there is a sign, there is delusion. Where there is perception, there is deception.” What label—clean, sober, addict, alcoholic, or another—has both helped and boxed you in?
- “There is no way to happiness; happiness is the way.” Where do you catch yourself treating your recovery, or your life, as a means to a future payoff rather than a life of value right now?

Practice: Three Doors Source Adapted from the chapter’s three doors—emptiness, signlessness, and aimlessness (pp. 142–148). Purpose To open the three doors in meditation as a way of touching the chapter’s teaching directly.

1. Settle into the breath, allowing the mind and body to unify in concentration.
2. Emptiness: Bring to mind a struggle or conflict. Ask, “What conditions gave rise to this?” rather than “What’s wrong with them—or me?”
3. Signlessness: Notice a label you’ve placed on yourself, a situation, or someone else today. Breathe and release the label—look again with the Buddha Eye.
4. Aimlessness: Notice any pull toward a future in which life will be better. Come home to this breath and the abundance of now, already enough.
5. Explore the intersection—the interbeing—of the three doors: nothing separate, nothing confined by a label, nothing to do, and nowhere to go.
6. Close with Thay’s line: “There is no way to peace, peace is the way.”

Seven Days of Practice

1. Practice The Rhythm of Birth and Death with one full breath.
2. Notice a label or notion you cling to. Hold it more loosely today. Ask, “Am I sure?”
3. Practice Who Is _____? during your activities today. Who is breathing? Who is talking? Who is chewing? Widen the inquiry.
4. Notice one moment of “burning”—craving or striving—and notice what is here without need or want, cooling the flames of affliction.
5. Honor someone whose care lives on in you. Hold them in your heart and share that care with all beings.
6. Practice Three Doors: trace a struggle to its conditions rather than blame, set down one label, and come back to now.
7. Remember that “a cloud never dies.” Look for the continuation of something profound that you thought had ended.

Carry Forward There is no way to peace, peace is the way. Be the peace.

Seventh Factor: Equanimity

pp. 149–176 · the chapter closes the book and centers on the Twelfth Step

“If mindfulness is the ground of practice, equanimity is the flower that mindfulness blooms.” This final part follows the chapter’s own arc: from the nervous system and the four qualities of true love, through the three tenets of not knowing, bearing witness, and loving action, into the Twelfth Step itself, the bodhisattva vow, and the book’s own closing images of community, difficulty, gratitude, and continuation.

Study Thirteen—The Ground of Equanimity: Nervous System, Heart, and Right Action

pp. 149–164

PRACTICE INTENTION To find equanimity not as detachment but as spaciousness—a regulated nervous system and an open heart that can hold both what is easy to love and what is hard—then let that steadiness move into loving action.

The Zone of Recovery

Read pp. 149–155

Reflection

- When is your heart spacious like a river, and when does it constrict into a teacup? What cues signal your condition and what enlarges or diminishes your capacity to hold difficulty?
- The nervous system's fear responses—fight, flight, freeze, and fawning—are described as a “language of love” seeking to protect us. How does this understanding change your relationship to these responses and the conditions in which they arise?
- “Indifference is a ‘near enemy’ of equanimity.” Where might you have mistaken numbness or disconnection for well-being? How do genuine steadiness, emotional shutdown, and spiritual bypassing feel different in your body?

Practice: Tuning the Instrument Source Adapted from the vagus nerve and “lute string” material, and the practice of humming to regulate the nervous system (pp. 153–154). **Purpose** To use the body, not just the mind, to create the conditions equanimity needs.

1. Settle into your body and breath. Notice your current state: wound tight and activated, gone slack and shut down, or resonant, balanced, and at ease.
2. This is just the way it is right now; there is nothing to fix. With kind attention, listen for the language of the nervous system. Notice your breath, heartbeat, muscle tension, posture, energy, and feeling state. Allow it all to be, connecting with the experience without judgment.
3. Feel the support beneath you. Let the body breathe deeply and naturally, allowing the exhale to release unnecessary tension.
4. Hum gently for one or two minutes. Feel the vibration in your face, throat, chest, and body. Let the sound find a comfortable pitch and volume. Humming is harmonizing. Humming is the music. Play with the pitch if you like.
5. Notice what you notice: spaciousness or constriction, warmth or coolness, and the quality of your breath. Continue to tune the instrument. If you feel tight, soften or rock gently. If you feel dull or shut down, adjust to a more upright posture, open your eyes, or walk mindfully. Notice the flow of impermanence, your own fluidity. Do not force yourself into a different state.
6. Pause and listen again. Ask, “Am I reacting or responding? Is my attention on loving or on who isn’t loving me?” Bring the practice into your activities—at a meeting, before a hard conversation, or while driving.

The Brahmavihārās

Read pp. 155–158

Reflection

- Loving kindness does not have to be earned. If an injured bird or crying infant is worthy of care, what blocks us from offering the same unconditional kindness to ourselves? What might be an antidote for that?
 - Empathy feels another’s suffering; compassion responds—with the intention to help. What allows empathy to ripen into compassion, helping you remain present without being consumed or overwhelmed by the suffering?

- Sympathetic joy arises from the abundance of wholeness rather than comparison. When is it easy to celebrate another person's happiness or freedom? When does the burn of "Why them and not me?" close your heart?
- Equanimity allows love to extend beyond those who are easy to love. What helps you remain openhearted toward someone difficult without fixing, fleeing, approving harm, or abandoning yourself?

Practice: The Four Qualities of True Love Source Adapted from the brahmavihārās, the "four qualities of true love" (pp. 155–158). Purpose To touch each of the four immeasurable qualities, allowing them to widen beyond measure.

1. Settle into the body and breath. Let the nervous system rest and bring gentle attention to the heart. There is nothing to manufacture.
2. Loving Kindness: Offer yourself the sincere wish, "May I be happy, free from affliction, and at ease." Notice any resistance and include it within the field of kindness. You do not have to qualify for care.
3. Compassion: Bring to mind a manageable suffering—your own or another's. Meet it as one hand instinctively holds an injured finger: with tenderness and the intention to ease pain, without becoming overwhelmed.
4. Sympathetic Joy: Bring to mind someone's healing, happiness, freedom, or success. Let their joy become your joy. Notice any comparison or contraction, then return to the abundance of the heart.
5. Equanimity: Widen the field to include someone close, someone neutral, someone difficult, and all beings. Let the vast heart hold each without clinging, rejecting, fixing, or fleeing.
6. Close by sharing love without limit: to the living and the dead, the two-legged, the four-legged, and the legless, those who fly or swim, the born and the not-yet-born, across all space and time.

Not Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Loving Action

Read pp. 158–161

Reflection

- "Not knowing is the willingness to meet each moment... with fresh eyes"...without the filter of what we think we know. What assumption, judgment, or cherished certainty might soften if you asked, "Am I sure?"
- Bearing witness means staying present without turning away, drowning in reactive suffering, or impulsively rushing to fix it. Which of these responses is most familiar to you? What helps you remain grounded and open?
- There is a delicate line between helping and enabling, compassion and codependence. His mother said, "You are not welcome here. Call us when you've been clean for a year." The author calls this tough love that "saved my life." How do you discern whether an action supports healing or protects someone from the consequences they need to face?

Practice: Not Knowing, Bearing Witness, Loving Action Source Adapted from the Zen Peacemaker tenets of not knowing, bearing witness, and loving action, and the Third-Step koan "What does love look like here?" (pp. 159–161). Purpose To return from the certainty of judgment or reactivity to open awareness, wholehearted presence, and discerning action.

1. Bring to mind a manageable situation in which you feel uncertain, reactive, or out of balance. Settle into your body and breath.
2. Not Knowing: Notice what you assume, predict, or believe should happen. Ask, "Am I sure? What don't I yet see?" Let there be room for mystery.
3. Bearing Witness: Attend to what is actually here—facts, feelings, bodily sensations, words, silence, and what may remain unspoken. Listen without turning away or rushing to fix or resolve anything.
4. Remain grounded in the body and breath as you hold the whole situation. Notice the nervous-system response and any urge to rush toward action. Breathe with it and let it pass thanks to impermanence.
5. Loving Action: Ask, "What does love look like here?" Consider whether the wise response is a kind word, silence, patient listening, practical help, a step back, a boundary, or a clear no. Wait for an answer that feels grounded, not reactive.

6. If a clear action arises, carry it out without attachment to a particular result. If no action is clear, smile and allow that. Sometimes the loving action is simply bearing witness for a while longer.

Love in Action

Read pp. 161–164

Reflection

- The author imagined spiritual awakening as cosmic consciousness or a permanent state of perfection; he came to see it as “a verb, not a noun.” What expectations or preconceptions might prevent you from recognizing the awakening already unfolding in your life?
- Loving service gave the author’s life meaning and purpose, but it also became an obsession. How do you distinguish service naturally arising from the heart from service used to prove your value?
- Spiritual awakening and spiritual slumber are described as two sides of one coin. How does it change things to think of forgetfulness or falling short as impermanence rather than failure?

Practice: Setting the Spiritual GPS Source Adapted from the teaching that “moments of embodied aspiration become the setting for my spiritual GPS. When I drift off course, I recalibrate” (pp. 163–164). Purpose To anchor a felt memory of alignment you can return to, the way the author anchors moments of grace in the body.

1. Recall a specific moment when you felt fully aligned with your own highest aspiration—not a general feeling, but one specific memory.
2. Gently reenter the moment. What did it feel like in your body and spirit? Allow it to rise again and nourish it, feeling it with your senses wide open.
3. Notice warmth, openness, steadiness, energy, lightness, softness, or any other feeling state or sensation.
4. Breathe with it and feel the fullness of the moment. Anchor the experience and let it imprint in your body. Set this as Home, your most noble embodiment.
5. Investigate where you may feel lost or off course. Allow it, without shame; this is a detour, not a destination. Breathe and recalibrate, coming home to the heart of aspiration. Ask, “Where does love point me now?”
6. “I have arrived, I am home.” Return to this embodied setting whenever it comes to mind or your inner GPS needs recalibration.

Seven Days of Practice

1. Pause to notice whether your heart is a teacup or a river. What would widen the container?
2. Practice Tuning the Instrument: Listen to your nervous system, hum, breathe, and make a gentle harmonic adjustment. Notice what shifts.
3. Offer yourself loving kindness without needing to qualify for it. Thank yourself for your tender heart and care.
4. Nourish joy and celebrate another person’s happiness, healing, or freedom. If comparison arises, notice the contraction and return to the abundance of the heart.
5. Practice not knowing before and during a conversation. When you feel certain about a person or situation, pause and ask, “Am I sure? What don’t I yet see?”
6. Bear witness without turning away or rushing to fix. Listen and look deeply with the Buddha eye.
7. Practice coming home with your Spiritual GPS. Ask, “What does loving action look like here?”

Carry Forward What does love look like here?

Study Fourteen—Equanimity in the World: Vow, Community, and Completion

pp. 164–176

PRACTICE INTENTION To nurture and mature the awakening factor of equanimity and let it penetrate all areas of life: in vow, in action, and in the silent transmission of presence and continuation that is the fruit of our understanding and practice.

The Great Vow

Read pp. 164–167

Reflection

- Bodhisattvas represent awakened qualities we already possess and aspire to cultivate. Which quality—wisdom, action, compassion, perseverance, loving kindness, or nondiscrimination—are you being called to nourish and embody more fully now?
- The Never-Disparaging Bodhisattva looks beyond behavior and sees each person’s capacity to awaken. Whose light is difficult for you to see? What would it mean to look again—including at yourself?
- The Four Great Vows are aspirational. “The impossibility doesn’t diminish the vow. It sanctifies it.” Where in your life do you avoid committing to something because you’re afraid you can’t finish it? What changes when you orient your life toward an infinite aspiration without expectation?
- The chapter names ordinary figures as the Bodhisattvas of Showing Up, Making Coffee, and Welcoming Newcomers. Which everyday bodhisattvas have supported your recovery? Which one might you already be?

Practice: The Joy of Living Source Adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh’s rendering of the Four Great Vows and the chapter’s list of “everyday bodhisattvas” (pp. 165–167). **Purpose** To recognize and nourish your own awakened nature.

1. Settle into the body and breath, calming the body and feelings. Allow a small smile to bloom, however long that takes.
2. Reflect on the Four Great Vows: to embody the awakened way, to meet all beings with kindness, to touch suffering with patience and love, to explore the Dharma deeply, and to surrender to the mystery of interbeing. Let them seep into your bones and penetrate your heart.
3. Notice resistance or fear. Call on the Bodhisattvas to help you embrace and nourish the qualities you need in this moment.
4. See yourself as a bodhisattva in training: the Bodhisattva of Trying, the Bodhisattva of Sometimes Getting It Right, or the Bodhisattva of Wanting to Understand.
5. Touch your own goodness and recognize what you are doing right, your program in action, the care you express, and the habit energies you have already transformed.
6. The Twelfth Step and the Great Vow embody the joy of living. Touch it, taste it. Smell the incense of your own heart. Let it fill the moments of your life.

Shining Light

Read pp. 167–168

Reflection

- “Flower Watering” invites us to see, recognize, and name what is good and beautiful in others. It is a practice of appropriate attention and Right Speech that transforms our negativity bias and builds connection. Where in your life could you offer more flowers? What might be holding you back?
- “This is a time to receive, not to respond.” Where do you struggle to simply receive feedback, praise, or care without needing to respond to it?

- They wrote, “When we look after the other person, we are looking after ourselves.” Where have you seen this to be true in your family or recovery community?

Practice: Flower Watering and Shining the Light Source Adapted from the Plum Village practice of Shining the Light described in the chapter (pp. 167–168). Purpose To practice the book’s own guidance—naming what you appreciate generously before naming anything else.

1. Choose a trusted person, living or dead, to formally or informally practice this with.
2. Prior to beginning, examine your intention. If you are carrying resentment, blame, or a desire to prove a point, pause and consider the Beginning Anew practice instead.
3. Settle into the body and breath. Remember that your perception is limited, that you are part of the relationship, and that the purpose is to support the other person’s freedom and joy.
4. Begin with flower watering, sharing the qualities and behaviors you have observed that are esteemable or inspiring. Frame them with specific examples that have watered wholesome seeds in you.
5. If appropriate and grounded in bodhicitta, illuminate a growing edge with humility and loving speech.
6. If you are the one receiving the light, be the river; practice deep listening and Not Knowing. Let it penetrate and hold it in silence. Giving or receiving, close with a bow of gratitude.

Unconditional Love

Read pp. 168–171

Reflection

- The author’s care “curdled into an afflicted state of anxious overwhelm.” How do you recognize when precious care has morphed into an afflicted state of fear, worry, or outrage? What helps compassion and balance return?
- “My fear and antipathy toward those who exclude or diminish the people I care about is itself a form of othering.” Where might your own righteous anger be mirroring what you resist?
- The Buddha declined the “gift” of another person’s abuse: “If I do not accept it, it remains yours.” What anger, fear, or unhappiness are you carrying that does not belong to you? What would it mean to refuse it without closing your heart?
- Sometimes silence is complicity; other times, it is the “sacred silence” of deep listening. How do you discern when love asks you to speak and when it asks you to listen?

Practice: One Breath of Unconditional Love Source Adapted from the author’s mindful breathing, recognition of shared fear, and aspiration to release perceptions of “us” and “them” (pp. 168–171). Purpose To hold fear and outrage with tender equanimity, recognize shared humanity, and allow unconditional love to arise for a breath or a moment.

1. Settle into the body and breath. Widen your awareness to include the support of the Earth and the ordinary life around you—sounds, light, air, movement, and stillness.
2. Bring to mind someone whose views or choices have felt threatening or painful to you. Notice the story, then move beneath it into the body. Where do fear, anger, grief, or tension live?
3. Breathing in, hold your own fear with tenderness. Look deeply and touch the care beneath it—the people, values, or life you long to protect. Breathing out, stay with it and soften around it.
4. If you feel solid and grounded, consider the other person and the causes and conditions that shape their view and actions. The object of their fear may differ from yours, but the bodily experience is human. Let this recognition widen the heart without excusing harm or abandoning discernment.
5. Breathing in, recognize the ocean of fear we all swim in. Breathing out, release the notion of “us” and “them,” at least for a moment. Whose fear is it?
6. If you are able, silently offer: “May I be well. May they be well. May we all be free of afflictions. May we all recognize our own awakened nature and realize the mind of love.” If this is not available today, no worries—that is okay. If we can awaken unconditional love for even half a breath, we know we can do it again. The more often a seed is watered, the more readily it grows.

The Gifts

Read pp. 171–173

Reflection

- “The text hasn’t changed; I have.” Where has something you’ve read or heard many times landed differently? What had changed or ripened in you? • Chögyam Trungpa taught, “Everything is either poison or medicine—it depends on how you take it.” What in your past was poison that has become medicine, or the reverse? • In the story of Brother Pháp Hải, his presence was “a refreshing breeze” that eased another person’s sorrow. No words were needed. When has someone’s quiet presence been a healing balm for you? What do your own presence and footsteps transmit?

Practice: A Refreshing Breeze Source Adapted from the encounter in which Brother Pháp Hải’s embodied serenity eased a grieving woman’s sorrow (pp. 173–174). Purpose To be the breeze through embodied recovery and practice, infusing each moment with our loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

1. Settle into the breath, calming the body and mind. Think of all the goodness in your life and the many gifts you have received. Choose one wholesome quality that has been nourished and is alive in you—freedom, ease, serenity, willingness, gratitude, or one of the four qualities of true love. 2. Explore the felt sense of that quality. For the rest of the practice, replace [freedom] with the quality you chose. Where and how does it live in your body? Hold and nourish it, welcoming it into every cell. Let it become a living resource. Silently say, “I am the [freedom]; the [freedom] is me.” 3. Staying with the breath, slowly stand and begin to walk mindfully, right where you are. Bring your full presence to every step, nourished and enriched with your [freedom]. Feel the Earth and plant seeds of [freedom] with every step. 4. Let the goodness of your [freedom] and the harmony of body and mind infuse your presence. 5. Do not try to project or perform the quality. Let it naturally shape your posture, pace, expression, and way of meeting the world. Bring it with you into your ordinary activities. 6. When you encounter someone, offer warm attention. Listen deeply, without preparing advice or trying to create an effect. Let a smile, silence, or genuine interest be enough.

Riding the Waves of Deathlessness

Read pp. 173–176

Reflection

- “Bubbles of bodhicitta rise through the murky depths.” What helps unconditional love rise through sorrow, sickness, heartbreak, or loss in your own life? • The chrysanthemum is Thay’s smile continuing in the author and the community. Whose love, teaching, or way of being continues through you? How are you carrying it forward? • “We are all teachers.” What are you transmitting through your presence, choices, and way of living? When the chapter asks, “Are you living right?” what does that question ask of you?

Practice: Bubbles of Bodhicitta Source Adapted from the author’s own insight gatha and its imagery of bubbles rising through murky water to the sky (pp. 174–175). Purpose To close this guide the way the book closes its final chapter—with an image, not a conclusion.

1. Settle into the breath. Let your body be the water—sometimes murky, sometimes clear. 2. Bring to mind a difficulty that you can hold gently right now: sorrow, sickness, heartache, or uncertainty. Let it be part of the ocean of blues. 3. Breathing in, notice a bubble of care, aspiration, or love rising in you, however small.

4. Breathing out, let it rise, unhurried, toward the surface and the open sky. “Mmm”—the sound of humming, of calm abiding. 5. Notice: the bubble doesn’t erase the murky water. Both are true at once. 6. Close with “Ahhh”—a sound of arrival. Ask yourself the book’s own last question: “Are you living right?”

Seven Days of Practice

1. Call forth one awakened quality you need or want to develop today. Give yourself an ordinary bodhisattva name and embody it in your actions. 2. Practice Flower Watering: look for what is good and beautiful in others and share your appreciation with them. Try this with friends, coworkers, clients, or strangers, such as a server or cashier. 3. Nurture your most precious aspirations: to practice spiritual principles in all of your affairs, to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, or to embody unconditional love. Let go of the results and appreciate the beauty of your spirit and heart. 4. Be the Breeze: walk with ease and dignity, listen with care and attention, sit with freedom, and speak the language of your heart through words or silence. 5. Recognize and cherish the gifts of recovery, your moments of insight, and your growing capacity for love and care. 6. Be a Medicine Buddha, helping and healing yourself and others, turning poison into medicine. 7. Nourish goodness in yourself and rise like a bubble of bodhicitta through the ocean of blues. Offer hope and refuge to those who suffer—nourishing the mind of love.

Carry Forward Are you living right?

When Practice Is Not Enough

This guide offers a contemplative companion to the book *12 Step Zen: Pathways of Recovery*. Mindfulness practice, the programs of recovery, and the Dharma are paths to liberation, but they may not be enough to carry the full weight of a crisis, a medical condition, or an unsafe situation alone.

Consider bringing in more support—alongside your practice and program—when conditions are overwhelming and you notice:

- Cravings or urges that feel unmanageable, or an actual return to use.
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm, or of harming someone else.
- Trauma symptoms that will not settle: flashbacks, dissociation, panic, or a sense of danger that will not lift.
- Depression, anxiety, or another mental health condition that is worsening or interfering with daily life.
- Drift away from meetings, a sponsor, treatment, or the people who support your recovery.
- Any situation where your safety, or someone else's, feels genuinely at risk.

None of these mean your practice has failed, or that you have. They mean it is time to widen the circle of support around it.

REACH OUT Call your sponsor or fellowship. Contact your therapist, physician, or treatment provider. If you are in crisis, thinking about suicide, or need immediate mental-health or substance-use support, call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7 in the United States and its territories. If you or someone else is in immediate danger or experiencing a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. Outside of the United States, contact the crisis or emergency service available in your country.

Asking for help is not a detour from the path. It is the path, practiced with both eyes open.

Editorial and Source Note

Every Read pointer, quotation, and page citation in this guide—including those in the Index to the Book—refers to the printed pages of 12 Step Zen: Pathways of Recovery.

SOURCE Where a practice’s Source line quotes the book directly, that language appears in quotation marks and is drawn verbatim from the cited pages. Where a practice adapts a teaching, image, or technique from the book into a new form—a discourse turned into numbered steps, a story turned into a reflection—the Source line says so explicitly, usually with the word “adapted.” Where a reflection or practice is original to this guide, built to carry a chapter’s teaching into daily life without a direct textual source, no such attribution appears; these constructions are the guide author’s own.

Sanskrit and Pali terms (*samādhi*, *mettā*, *upekkhā*, and the like) follow the spelling used in 12 Step Zen itself, or standard transliteration where the book does not specify one.

Readers moving through all Seven Factors in sequence will notice certain phrases and practices returning: the Buddha eye, Not Knowing, “This is just the way it is right now,” the walking-meditation counting convention, and others. These are not repetitions or errors. They are intentional threads, carried forward the way the book itself returns to certain images across chapters, so that a phrase learned early can keep doing quiet work later.

As noted at the outset, this guide is an independent, unofficial companion—not approved, endorsed, or sponsored by 12 Step Zen’s publisher or by any Twelve-Step fellowship.

Index to the Book

This index locates the doctrinal terms, teachings, and figures of 12 Step Zen: Pathways of Recovery (Parallax Press, 2026) within the book itself—the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Establishments of Mindfulness,

the Brahmavihārās, and the other frameworks the book draws on. It points to where each is treated in the source text, not to this guide’s own Studies and Practices.

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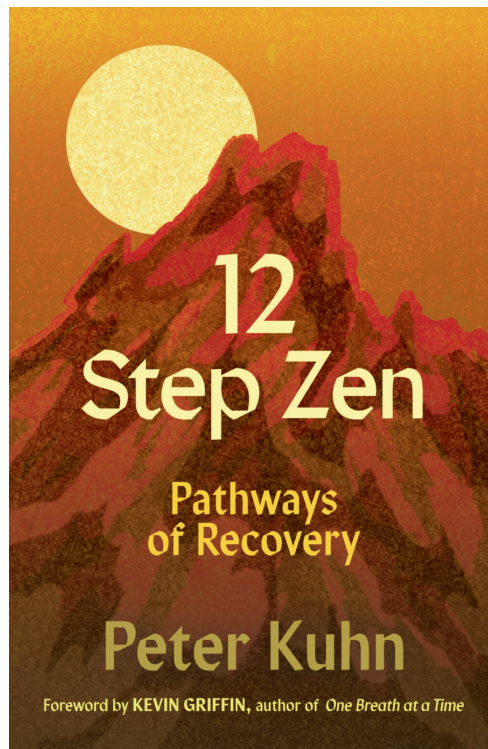
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We often think the past is gone
and unchangeable, but it lives on
in the present moment.

When we meet it with
understanding, we can transform
the past in the present.



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