



**RECOVERY
DHARMA**

Steel Lotus

S A N G H A

INQUIRY WORKBOOK

How to Use Buddhist Practices and Principles
to Heal the Suffering of Addiction



Workbook adapted from:

Recovery Dharma

www.recoverydharma.org

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ISBN: 978-1-08604-000-5

www.steel-lotus.com

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Preface

Once we make a decision to recover from addiction—to substances, habits, people, whatever—it can be scary. The feeling is often one of loss and loneliness, because recovery can shake our sense of identity, our idea of who we are. *Who will I be if I let my addiction go?* Change can be hard to face, even if we know we’re letting go of something that’s a danger to us. For many of us, the first and most significant challenge was finding a safe and stable place to begin healing.

This is a workbook about using Buddhist practices and principles to recover from addiction, but you don’t need to become a Buddhist to benefit from this program. One of the most revolutionary things the Buddha taught was that the mind is not only the source of great suffering—due to craving, greed, anger, and confusion—but the cure for that suffering as well. So what we’re doing is using an ancient, proven way to literally change our minds. And we’re choosing to trust in our own potential for wisdom and compassion for others *and* ourselves.

What you have in your hands is a collaboration from many members of our community. It’s intended to be a friendly guide for those new to this path as well as long-term practitioners. It’s structured around what are sometimes called the “three jewels of Buddhism:” **the Buddha** (the potential for our own awakening and the goal of the path), **the Dharma** (how we get there), and **the Sangha** (who we travel with). We’ll share how we have used this program to recover from addiction and the ways we’ve made it our own: not as a one-size-fits-all approach, but as a dynamic set of tools and techniques that anyone can use to find relief from the suffering of addiction.

What is Recovery Dharma?



Notes

The word *dharma* doesn't have a single English meaning. It's a word in an ancient language called Sanskrit, and it can be translated as "truth," "phenomena," or "the nature of things." When it's capitalized, the word *Dharma* usually means the teachings of the Buddha and the practices based on those teachings.

The Buddha knew that all human beings, to one degree or another, struggle with craving—the powerful, sometimes blinding desire to change our thoughts, feelings, and circumstances. Those of us who experience addiction have been more driven to use substances or behaviors to do this, but the underlying craving is the same. And even though the Buddha didn't talk specifically about addiction, he understood the obsessive nature of the human mind. He understood our attachment to pleasure and aversion to pain. He understood the extreme lengths we can sometimes go to, chasing what we want to feel and running away from the feelings we fear. And he found a solution.

This workbook describes a way to free ourselves from the suffering of addiction using Buddhist practices and principles. This program leads to recovery from addiction to substances like alcohol and drugs, and also from what we refer to as *process addictions*. We can also become addicted to sex, gambling, technology, work, codependence, shopping, food, media, self-harm, lying, stealing, obsessive worrying. This is a path to freedom from any repetitive and habitual behavior that causes suffering.

Many of us who have found our way here might be new to Buddhism. There are unfamiliar words, concepts, and ways of looking at the world. It can be intimidating and uncomfortable to sit in a meeting with people throwing around words like karma, Dharma, Sangha, and Buddha. If you have felt this way, you're not alone. The purpose of this workbook is to lay out our path and practice in a clear and simple way that can be of use to people who are brand new to recovery and to Buddhism, as well as those with some experience. It describes the original Buddhist teachings to show where our program comes from. It introduces the essence of Buddhism's basic teachings—the Four Noble Truths—in a way that shows how practicing the Eightfold Path is a pragmatic tool-kit for dealing with the challenges of both early and long-term recovery.

This is a renunciation-based program. Regardless of the type of addiction we identify with, all of our members commit to a basic

abstinence from the substance or behavior of our addiction. For those of us whose addictions involve things like food and technology from which complete abstinence may not be possible, renunciation will mean something different, based on thoughtful boundaries and intentions in our behaviors. For some of us, abstinence from things like obsessive sexual behavior or compulsively seeking out love and relationships may be necessary as we work to understand and find meaningful boundaries. Many of us have found that after renouncing our primary addiction for a period of time, other harmful behaviors and process addictions become apparent in our lives. But rather than getting discouraged, we found that we can also meet these behaviors with compassion and patient investigation. We believe recovery is a lifelong, holistic process of peeling back layers of habits and conditioned behaviors to find our own, sometimes hidden, potential for awakening.

Our program is peer-led: we don't follow any one teacher or leader. We support each other as partners walking the path of recovery together. This is not a program based in dogma or religion, but in finding the truth for ourselves. This is wisdom that has worked for us, but it is not the only path. It's fully compatible with other spiritual paths and programs of recovery. We know from our own experience that true recovery is only possible with the intention of radical honesty, understanding, awareness, and integrity, and we trust you to discover your own path. We believe this program can help you do just that.

Ours is a program that asks us to never stop growing. It asks us to own our choices and be responsible for our own healing. It's based on kindness, generosity, forgiveness, and deep compassion. We do not rely on tools of shame and fear as motivation. We know these haven't worked in our own individual pasts, and have often created more struggle and suffering through relapse and discouragement. The courage it takes to recover from addiction is ultimately courage of the heart, and we aim to support each other as we commit to this brave work.

Many of us have spent our lives beating ourselves up. In this program, we renounce violence and doing harm, including the harm and violence we do to ourselves. We believe in the healing power of forgiveness. We put our trust in our own potential to awaken and recover, in the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha, and in the people we meet and connect with in meetings and throughout our journey in recovery.

The truth is that we can never truly escape the circumstances and conditions that are part of the human condition. We've tried that already—through drugs and alcohol, through sex and codependency, through gambling and technology, through work and shopping, through food or the restriction of food, through obsession and the futile attempts to control our experiences and feelings—and we're here because we realized it didn't work. This is a program that asks us to recognize and accept that some pain and disappointment will always be present, to investigate the unskillful ways we have dealt with that pain in the past, and to develop a habit of understanding, compassion, and mercy toward our own pain, the pain of others, and the pain we have caused others due to our ignorance and confusion. That acceptance is what brings freedom from the suffering that made our pain unbearable.

This workbook is only an introduction to a path that can bring liberation and freedom from the cycle of suffering created by addiction. The intention, and the hope, is that every person on the path will be empowered to make it their own.

May you be happy.

May you be at ease.

May you be free from suffering.

Recovery is Possible

In the pages of this workbook is a path, a set of principles and practices, that can lead to the end of our suffering and see us through the damage that we piled onto ourselves through our addictions. The path is based on gaining and maintaining *mindfulness* of our feelings, bodies, minds, and experiences. During our journey, we come to accept that we're responsible for our own actions, and that every choice has a consequence. If we act unskillfully or mindlessly, we will experience pain in our own feelings, thoughts, and experiences (*karma*), and we may cause harm to others. We begin to recognize that every thought, feeling, and experience is only temporary (*impermanence*), that it will pass if we allow it to, and trusting this can provide a safe harbor in moments of craving or pain. We start to believe that even the most difficult, traumatic, and painful actions and events of our past don't define who we are today, nor do they define the possibilities in our future. It is our choices and actions *now* that define us.

At the same time, we can start to notice and reflect on experience without getting attached to it or to the stories we tell ourselves about it (*selflessness*). We come to accept that we can never satisfy all of our desires and craving. We see this in our struggles with impermanence, with sickness and aging, not getting what we want or losing what we have, not feeling loved by those we desire or feeling rejected by those whose caring we want the most. We sometimes have to deal with people and situations that are painful or uncomfortable (*unsatisfactoriness*).

But with clear understanding, we can begin to choose more appropriate actions and responses to our experience, and it is in this choice that we find freedom and relief from suffering. When we act with full awareness of each choice, of even the smallest action, we can begin to notice the motivations behind everything we do. We can begin to ask, "Is this action useful or not? Is it skillful or unskillful?" Whenever we're confused or feel lost, we have meditation tools that we can use to simply return to the present moment, to our experience of the present as it is for us *right now*, and we can check in with our sangha—our wise friends—for added perspective and compassionate support.

So, what do we gain by practicing understanding, ethical conduct, and mindfulness? We're asked to sit with discomfort, to experience it without fear or resistance, and to know that it's impermanent. We

learn that dukkha is part of the human condition, and efforts to avoid or deny it lead to more unhappiness and suffering. We've learned that we can never satisfy our desires through sense experiences, through chasing pleasure and trying to hold onto it. Every pleasant sense experience will end, and the more we try to hold onto it and turn desire into need or craving, the more we suffer dukkha. We're mindful that dissatisfaction and unhappiness have beginnings. By tracing the dissatisfaction or unhappiness back to its root, we can weed it out of the mind.

We follow the Eightfold Path, which allows us to develop understanding. It teaches us the karmic advantage of compassion, lovingkindness, appreciative joy, and equanimity. We learn the quiet satisfaction of living a more ethical and mindful life.

What we are achieving is what in Buddhism is called **sukha**, or true happiness. This is not the temporary pleasure that comes from a high or other temporary sense experience, but the inner peace and well-being that comes from a balanced, mindful life. It is the opposite of the suffering and unsatisfactoriness of dukkha. Sukha is freedom from hate, greed and confusion. It is an expansive approach to life, being able to sit with and move through feelings of discomfort, dissatisfaction, and discontent. Many of us have been running from and denying dukkha for a very long time, but we have found that it is only when we stop running that we are able to truly access authentic happiness. We can practice the message:

I am here.

This is the way it is right now.

This is a moment of suffering.

May I give myself the care I need at this moment.

May I accept this without struggling, but also without giving up.

We've started to learn that mindfulness involves investigating our unskillful actions and choices, both past and present, and choosing to act with more wisdom in the future. Rather than being bogged down by guilt or shame about the past, we can use it as a guide to making different choices in the present. As we devote energy to awakening and recovery, we'll learn to investigate our present and our past with wisdom rather than craving or aversion. We'll experience the growth of trust in our own capacity for, and right to, recovery.

As we get a clearer understanding of what we're doing in our lives, of the choices we are making and the consequences of those choices, we gain the opportunity to develop generosity, lovingkindness,

forgiveness, and equanimity. These are central to Buddhist practice, and to our recovery. We learn to give freely, because we understand that clinging to what is “mine” is based on the delusion that we are what we possess, or what we control. We learn to have *metta*, or lovingkindness, toward all beings in the world, whether we know them or not.

We come to understand that our practice isn’t just for ourselves, but is based on the interconnectedness and happiness of all living beings. Recovery transforms how we show up for those around us. We can become the compassionate, generous, and wise friend whose calming voice and steadfast support can help others to understand their own struggles and find their own path to healing.

There is no magic bullet, no single action or practice that will end suffering. This is a path composed of a set of practices that help us deal with suffering and respond wisely to our own lives. We cannot escape or avoid dukkha, but we can begin to be more at peace knowing there is a path forward: a path with less suffering, less craving, less aversion, less destruction, and less shame. It’s a path without an end. It requires effort and awareness. And we don’t have to do it alone.

Recovery is the lifelong process of recovering our true natures and finding a way to an enduring and non-harmful sense of happiness. In recovery, we can finally find the peace so many of us had been searching for in our addictions. We can break through our isolation and find a community of wise friends to support us on our path. We can build a home for ourselves, *within* ourselves, and we can help others do the same. The gift we give to ourselves, to one another, and to the world, is one of courage, understanding, compassion, and serenity. We all experience growth differently, and at our own pace. But the most important message of this workbook is that the journey, the healing, can start now for you and for each of us.

May you find your path to recovery.

May you trust in your own potential for awakening.

Where to Begin

So how *can* we use Buddhism for our recovery? There are three ways in which we focus our energy: not step-by step, but in a holistic way as our insight and our awareness grow.

We come to understand the Four Noble Truths and use them as a guide for our own path of recovery. This program doesn't ask us to believe in anything other than our own potential to wake up: just allowing ourselves to believe that it's possible, or even that it *might* be possible. We begin to believe that our own efforts will make a difference. This is the realization that there is a way to recover and then the decision to start that process.

As we learn about the Four Noble Truths—including the Eightfold Path that leads to the end of the suffering caused by addiction—we put these principles into practice in our lives. This workbook includes an introduction to these truths, and there are many ways to continue studying them. The Eightfold Path is a guide to a non-harming way of being in the world. It's not just a philosophy, but a plan of action.

Meditation is an essential part of the program. This workbook has some basic instructions so you can start right away. Most of us have found it very helpful to attend meetings that include an opportunity to practice meditation with others. A key to this program is establishing a regular meditation practice, in and outside of meetings. This will help us begin the process of investigating our own minds, our reactivity, and our behavior. We look deeply at the nature and causes of our suffering so we can find a path to freedom that's based on authentic self-knowledge.

The following chapters talk about these three aspects of the program—the “three jewels” of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—as a way of developing the wisdom, ethical conduct, and spiritual practice that we have found leads to recovery. We hope that people and groups will use this workbook in ways that are useful for their own processes of recovery. We offer some suggestions in that spirit. You're invited to take what works for you and leave the rest.

At the end of each section are a series of questions to explore. These Inquiries can be used as part of a formal process of self-investigation with a mentor, wise friend, or group; as tools to explore a specific life situation; as guides for a daily self-inquiry practice; or as meeting discussion topics. A wise friend or mentor can be of great help in

deepening your understanding, and we encourage you to reach out to people you encounter at meetings. Supportive friendships are an integral part of the practice. The questions may bring up shame, guilt, or sadness; or, for some, they may potentially activate trauma. It can be very beneficial to get supports set up ahead of time, such as taking the questions only one at a time, timing the work so you can have a chance to engage in self-care afterwards, and so forth. The intent of the questions is to deepen our practice so we can experience relief sooner, not to bring us more suffering.

Our path is not a checklist, but is rather a practice in which we choose where and how to invest our energy in a way that is both wise and compassionate toward ourselves and others. We do not “complete” our journey based on how much we meditate or how many meetings we go to or how many written inventories we’ve completed. The practice of the Eightfold Path helps us develop insight and self-compassion as we begin to look into the causes and conditions that led to our own suffering with addiction. The tools will come to bear the signs of wear and markings of our using them.

This path doesn’t have an end. Your life, like all of ours, will probably continue to present you with challenges. What the path *does* offer, however, is a way out of the suffering that our habitual reactions to challenges often bring, and an end to the illusion of escape we tried to find in substances or behaviors. It’s a way to break our own chains with our own hands. It’s a path of freedom.

The Practice

Renunciation: We commit to the intention of abstinence from alcohol and other addictive substances and behaviors.

Meditation: We commit to the intention of developing a daily meditation practice.

Meetings: We attend recovery meetings and commit to becoming an active part of the community, offering our own experiences and service wherever possible.

The Path: We commit to deepening our understanding of the Four Noble Truths and to practicing the Eightfold Path in our daily lives.

Inquiry and Investigation: We explore the Four Noble Truths as they relate to our addictive behavior through writing and sharing in-depth, detailed Inquiries.

Sangha, Wise Friends, Mentors: We cultivate relationships within a recovery community, to both support our own recovery and support the recovery of others.

Growth: We continue our study of these Buddhist principles and undertake a lifelong journey of growth and awakening.

The Truth: Dharma

The Buddha taught the way to free ourselves from this suffering. The heart of these teachings (which we call the Dharma) is the Four Noble Truths. These truths, and the corresponding commitments, are the foundation of our program:

- 1. There is suffering.** We commit to understanding the truth of suffering.
- 2. There is a cause of suffering.** We commit to understanding that craving leads to suffering.
- 3. There is an end to suffering.** We commit to understanding and experiencing that less craving leads to less suffering.
- 4. There is a path that leads to the end of suffering.** We commit to cultivating the path. Like a map that shows us the path, these truths help us find our way in recovery.

Questions for Inquiry of the First Noble Truth

Make a list of the behaviors and actions associated with your addiction(s) that you consider harmful. Without exaggerating or minimizing, think about the things you have done that have caused harm to yourself and others.

For each behavior listed, write how you have suffered because of that behavior, and write how others have suffered because of that behavior. List any other costs or negative consequences you can think of, such as finances, health, relationships, sexual relations, or missed opportunities.

Examples:

I drank and used drugs

My health, finances and relationships

Excessive sex

Sexual relationships, health

I restricted/purged food

My health, relationships

I gambled

My finances, missed opportunities

Excessive technology use

My health, missed opportunities

Action / Behavior

How I Suffered

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Reflection: First Noble Truth Inquiry

Do you notice any patterns? What are they?

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Questions for Inquiry of the Second Noble Truth

List situations, circumstances, and feelings that you may have used harmful behavior to try and avoid.

- Examples:
- I felt anxious*
 - I felt depressed*
 - I was scared of failure*
 - I felt financially insecure*
 - Self conscious of weight*
 - Couldn't handle being around family*

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A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

What made the addiction more important to you than any of these things you gave up?

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What might the wise and compassionate part of you—your Buddha nature—say about these doubts?

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Practice “letting go” of something small. Notice that the craving doesn’t last and that there’s a little sense of relief when you let it pass. That’s a little taste of freedom.

Today I’m going to practice letting go of:

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How did it feel to let it go?

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Questions for Inquiry of the Fourth Noble Truth

Understanding that recovery and the ending of suffering is possible, what is your path to recovery and ending the suffering of addiction?

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What challenges might you face and what tools and resources will you use to meet those challenges?

Challenge _____ Tools/Resources to Overcome

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What behavior can you change to more fully support your recovery?

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Questions for Inquiry of Wise Understanding

What's a situation in your life that is causing confusion or unease?

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What is the truth of this situation?

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Are you seeing clearly, or are you getting lost in judgment, taking things personally in stories you're telling yourself, or repeating past messages you've internalized? How?

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Is your vision clouded by greed, hatred, confusion, clinging, attachment, or craving? How?

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In what situations and parts of your life do you have the most difficulty separating desire from need?

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Are there areas or relationships where the drive to get what you desire overshadows any other consideration? Has this changed as you began or continue in recovery?

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Are there parts of your life where you are driven to continue unpleasant experiences because you think you “must” or “need to?”

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How is karma—the law of cause and effect—showing up right now? Where in your life are you dealing with the effects or aftermath of action you took in the past, both positive and negative?

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Questions for Inquiry of Wise Intention

During your periods of addictive behavior, how did you act in ways that were clinging, uncaring, harsh, cruel, or unforgiving?

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Toward whom (including yourself) were these feelings directed?

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How might generosity, compassion, lovingkindness, and forgiveness have changed your behavior?

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What actions have you taken that have harmed others?

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Have you formed an intention to reconcile with both yourself and the person or people you've harmed (to make amends)?

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If so, have you found a wise friend or mentor you can go to for guidance and support in the amends process, which is summarized below? What support can this person provide as you begin the process of amends?

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Making Amends

Have you done something intentionally that you now recognize caused harm to another? Who has been harmed by your actions?

Harmful action _____ Person(s) harmed

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Have you honestly formed the intention not to repeat harmful actions and to learn from the experience in future interactions? How do you know that you've honestly formed the intention?

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Have you begun the process of directly addressing the harmful actions of your past? How?

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What actions would restore balance in your own feelings and approach to whatever harm you have caused? Can these steps be taken without causing new harm to the person or the relationship?

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Are you being selfish or self-seeking? How?

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Are you being driven by aversion (running away from an unpleasant experience) or craving (grasping for pleasure)? How?

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How could you bring in a spirit of generosity, compassion, lovingkindness, appreciative joy, and forgiveness to this situation?

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How would this situation look different if you brought these factors to mind *before* reacting or responding?

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If you don't want to, can you at least have the intention and willingness to do so?

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Have you been dishonest or harsh in your communication?

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When, and in what specific ways?

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Do you use speech now to hurt or control people, to present a false idea or image of yourself or of reality, to demand attention, or to relieve the discomfort of silence?

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Detail specific instances in which you used speech to mislead, misdirect, or distract.

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During those times you were unskillful or created suffering, how would it have changed the outcome if you had acted out of compassion, kindness, generosity, and forgiveness?

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Would you now have a different emotional or mental response to your past actions if you had acted with these principles in mind?

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First Precept: Avoid causing harm to ourselves or others.

Have you caused harm? How? (Allow for a broad understanding of harm, including physical, emotional, mental, and karmic harm as well as financial, legal, moral, or other forms of harm.)

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Even if you can't point to specific harms that you have caused, have you acted in a way that purposely avoided being aware of the possibility of harm?

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Second Precept: Avoid stealing.

People “take” in many ways: we take goods or material possessions, we take time and energy, we take care and recognition. With this broad understanding of taking, have you taken what has not been freely given? How?

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What are specific examples or patterns where this has been true for you?

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Reviewing your sexual partners or activities, have you been fully aware in each instance of other existing relationships, prior or current mental or emotional conditions of yourself and your partner(s), and your own intentions in becoming sexually involved? How or how not?

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Has your sexual activity, both by yourself and with others, been based on non-harmful intentions? Have you entered into each sexual activity with awareness and understanding? How or how not?

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Fourth Precept: Avoid harmful speech.

Have you been dishonest? How?

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What patterns did your dishonesty take? Did you act or speak dishonestly to deny or misrepresent the truth about your own behavior or status?

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Were there particular situations in which your dishonesty was particularly present (for instance: when dealing with your addictive behaviors, in job or professional settings, among friends, with family)? Investigate the source of the dishonesty in each setting: Was it based on greed, confusion, fear, denial? Why were you lying?

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Fifth Precept: Avoid intoxicants/ intoxicating behavior.

Have you used intoxicants or other behaviors that cloud your ability to see clearly?

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What substances and behaviors have you become reliant on to change or cloud your awareness?

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Has this changed over time? Or, if you have periods of abstinence, were your habitual intoxicants or behaviors replaced by other ways to avoid awareness of your present circumstances and conditions? How?

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List ways you might practice the Five Precepts, compassion, lovingkindness, and generosity in your decision making.

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Questions for Inquiry of Wise Livelihood

Does your job cause harm? What is the specific nature of that harm?

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How can you do your job more mindfully and with an intention of compassion and non-harm?

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Do you bring an understanding of karma and kindness to your job, or do you compartmentalize it and exclude it from awareness of wise action?

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What part does greed play in the choices you make in your livelihood? Does greed get in the way of awareness or compassion?

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How can you be of more service in your community?

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How might you bring a spirit of generosity to your life, both in your profession and outside it?

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Questions for Inquiry of Wise Effort

What efforts have you made to connect with a wise friend, mentor, or dharma buddy who can help you develop and balance your efforts?

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Think of a situation that is causing you discomfort or unease. What is the nature of the effort you're bringing to the situation? Pay attention to whether it feels balanced and sustainable, or if you're leaning too far in the direction of either inactivity or overexertion?

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Are you dealing with overwhelming desires, aversions, laziness or discouragement, restlessness and worry, or doubt about your own ability to recover? How do these hindrances affect the choices you're making?

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Are you avoiding feelings by checking out and giving up, or through obsessive busyness and perfectionism?

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Questions for Inquiry of Wise Mindfulness

What are steps you can take to support a regular meditation practice?

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What are steps you can take to practice mindfulness more throughout the day by checking in with yourself about how you're feeling, and pausing before reacting to situations?

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What are steps you can take to sit with your discomfort instead of running from it or running toward temporary pleasure?

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What are steps you can take to question the “truths” that your mind tells you, rather than automatically believing them? Identify specific instances where your mind and perceptions “lied” to you about the truth of a situation, and how being aware of that might have changed your reaction and led to a less harmful outcome.

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Questions for Inquiry of Wise Concentration

How do you get unfocused or distracted in meditation?

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What distracts you the most?

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What are steps you can take to refocus your mind without judging your own practice?

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Notice what value or learning you could gain by carefully and kindly noticing where your mind has gone, or what has distracted you.

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What are steps you can take to use concentration to see clearly and act wisely?

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What are steps you can take to be kind and gentle with yourself through this process?

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