



# RECOVERY DHARMA NEWSLETTER

Winter 2019

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## Recovery Dharma News

### Board of Directors Elections

Make sure you are registered to vote for your next Recovery Dharma (RD) Board of Directors. Go to <https://mailchi.mp/recoverydharma/register> and submit your email to be added to the voter rolls. Please note this form is specific for voting and is separate from the regular mailing list. The deadline to register to vote is January 29.

More information about the candidates [is available on the RD website](#), including detailed statements from each candidate.

Voting will be online from January 15 through January 31, 2020. The new Recovery Dharma Board of Directors will be seated in mid-February.

Please spread the word about registering to vote in your meetings and local sangha social media pages!

## Upcoming Events and News

## **Wise Friendships**

The Wise Friendship Circle has been working together over the past few months to investigate a Buddhist model for peer support in recovery, and developed a draft of "[Developing Wise Friendships in Recovery Dharma](#)." A Zoom conference call was held to gather feedback, which the Circle is incorporating for the community.

## **Conference Update**

The global Recovery Dharma sangha voted and the host of the First Annual RDCon will be...Salt Lake City, Utah! Thank you to the Salt Lake Sangha!

Dates and a specific venue for the conference are still being worked out , so stay tuned for more info. If you'd like to volunteer for the global planning committee, send an email to [dwethington@recoverydharma.org](mailto:dwethington@recoverydharma.org).



## **Recovery Dharma Circle Updates**

Each of the following Sangha Circles have updates to share!

### **Outreach Circle**

Since our last Outreach Circle check-in we have had a lot of interest, expertise, and willingness to contribute to the conversation. We have added 30+ new members to the Slack channel, including treatment facility professionals. There have been contributions to meditations, refined meeting scripts, and insightful discussions on treatment facility approaches, and we have been field testing the meeting notebook with these contributions.

There is a desire to differentiate ourselves from 12-step terminology so the discussion has revealed that we are not comfortable with the name Hospitals and Institutions (H&I). The

discussion keeps coming back to the term Outreach Treatment. Within the Circle, sub-groups could form that focus on both professional and public outreach.

Future outreach treatment items that we are discussing:

1. Facilitator training – if and how to conduct formal “training” or co-facilitation (or both).
2. Inpatient Recovery Dharma (RD) presentations.
3. Treatment professional RD presentations.
4. Family component to Recovery Dharma (similar to Al-Anon)

Finally, we want to make sure that all of what we are working on can be shared with the larger community for wise intention and wise speech as it reflects Recovery Dharma’s core intentions and values. A lot of people have contributed to this circle and deserve much gratitude.

Circle Coordinator: Brent Tryon, [stirfryit2002@yahoo.com](mailto:stirfryit2002@yahoo.com)

### **Literature Circle**

The Literature Circle has been working on reviewing a lot of new material including a meeting packet for institutions and beginners by the Outreach Circle, new Four Foundations meditations and a meditation on Impermanence, and a professionally produced audiobook of the Recovery Dharma book to be released on Audible. The Circle will be meeting in early 2020 to discuss planning for the first quarter of the year, and we always welcome new members!

Circle Coordinator: Dirk Wethington, [dwethington@recoverydharma.org](mailto:dwethington@recoverydharma.org)

### **Community Wisdom Circle**

The Community Wisdom Circle is a new circle whose goal is to create platforms for wisdom-sharing among community members, as well as developing and distributing resources that foster personal and community growth.

Our first project was an open community Zoom call about “How to start a Recovery Dharma Meeting” on Dec 10. We invited both those with experience starting meetings and those seeking guidance to join us and share their wisdom and questions. The call was a big success with many participants, and the resulting FAQ will be shared as soon as possible. To watch the recording of this call, click this link:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBtS1DI\\_Bo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBtS1DI_Bo)

You can contact the Community Wisdom circle with any questions or ideas for future calls at [rdcommunitywisdom@gmail.com](mailto:rdcommunitywisdom@gmail.com)

Circle coordinator: Critter Spinneret, [critter@recoverydharma.org](mailto:critter@recoverydharma.org)

### **Inclusion Circle**

The Inclusion Circle is continuing its work reviewing and providing feedback on new and existing RD materials on how they can be more inclusive and accessible to diverse audiences. We’ve also begun work on FAQs and pamphlets about diversity and safety in our sanghas. We continue to seek diverse collaborators representing various identities to join our circle and help cover our blind spots. Contact us at [rdinclusioncircle@gmail.com](mailto:rdinclusioncircle@gmail.com).

Circle coordinator: Critter Spinneret, [critter@recoverydharma.org](mailto:critter@recoverydharma.org)

### **Wise Friendship Circle**

The Wise Friendships Circle has been actively working on a guide that describes how to build a strong Buddhist-inspired recovery support system using the Wise Friendship concept. The guide offers suggestions for different kinds of support in our community ranging within peer-to-peer and peer-to-group methods. We also provide best practices for those seeking support and those offering support. We brought this document to the community for feedback on a Zoom call on January 8, 2020, which the Circle is incorporating for the community. The recording of this call will be made available soon.

Circle coordinator: Paul Acciavatti, [paul@recoverydharma.org](mailto:paul@recoverydharma.org)

### **Core Intentions**

The Core Intentions Circle has been hard at work incorporating the feedback we received during our October and November community meetings. We held another set of community meetings in the first week of December to review our second released draft. The announcement which includes the updated draft of the Core Intentions can be found here: <https://recoverydharma.org/core-intentions-updated>

Circle coordinator: Gary Matulis, [garymatulis@recoverydharma.org](mailto:garymatulis@recoverydharma.org)

### **Structure Development**

The Structure Development Circle recently held its first meeting. The purpose of the circle is to define and document structures for Recovery Dharma community support at the global, regional, and intersangha levels. In cases where these structures already exist, we'll reach out to those involved and document common practices that have worked. More details on the circle can be found in our announcement:

<https://recoverydharma.org/new-structure-development-circle>

Circle coordinator: Gary Matulis, [garymatulis@recoverydharma.org](mailto:garymatulis@recoverydharma.org)

### **Sangha Support**

The Sangha Support Circle was originally formed during the origination of Recovery Dharma by a group of former Refuge Recovery Regional Representatives with the intention to offer support and guidance to our Recovery Dharma Sanghas. Since that time, Sangha Support Circle volunteers have worked to provide outreach to support local groups and create systems for organizing data related to meetings, contact persons and community needs.

The Sangha Support Circle has experienced a degree of “burnout” and decline in membership, and we were planning to open the Circle to new members in an effort to better serve our growing community. In light of the newly formed Structure Development Circle, and based on general consensus of our members, we decided to disband the Sangha Support Circle and offer any organizational systems and data over to the Structure Development Circle to use as they see fit. We trust in the peer-led and

grassroots structure of our organization, and in the members of our communities to guide us in their needs. Many of us committed to continuing the actual outreach and community-building we were already working on outside the structure of the SSC, and are eager to re-join whatever new structures come into being through the Structure Development Circle.

We appreciate the opportunities we've had to connect with each other, and with members of Recovery Dharma around the world, and we will continue to be of service to our communities.

### **Website Team**

The Website Team has been working hard to ensure that our website is stable and a source of support to our community. We were hacked repeatedly a few weeks ago, which prompted us to tighten our security features. Web Team members worked tirelessly to get the site back up and running and, fortunately, no permanent damage was done. Over the next several months, the Team will be focused on refreshing the website to give it a unique look and feel. Our website was originally developed during a very short timeline and we now have the opportunity to build a site that is specific to our community's needs. Our goal is to make the website a rich source of information and connection for all who are interested in following the Recovery Dharma path.

### **Merchandise Circle**

The Merchandise Circle was formed at the end of 2019 to support and coordinate efforts to market Recovery Dharma swag. It will formally kick off in early 2020, so keep an eye out for tee shirts and more!



**Keepin' it Local**

*Come for the Show, Stay for the Meeting: Recovery at 924 Gilman*

Thank you to **Critter S.** for this Sangha profile.

When you walk into 924 Gilman in Berkeley on a Sunday morning, you'll likely notice the stage, often strewn with drumsticks and set lists from the concert the night before. You'll notice the art on the walls, and the sculptures and odd objects hanging off the ceiling. 924 Gilman is primarily used as a punk music venue save for once a week on Sunday mornings when Recovery Dharma Gilman meets. It's grungy and funky and covered in spray paint with a punk feel. It's very Berkeley!

The Gilman Sangha in Berkeley, CA has been around for many years (with its previous incarnation as Refuge Recovery). Currently, our Sangha's regular meeting attendance is upwards of 40 members. Our members come from diverse backgrounds with a wide range of involvement and experiences. *"I love the diversity of the meeting, seeing so many people with different experiences, from different walks of life coming together, holding space for each other, being united in the practice, and recovery," said Dave S. "We check on each other, we stay in contact outside of Gilman, and we are always willing to lend an ear, a hand, or a shoulder. (Dr. Frankenstein would be proud). Aside from the individuals in the sangha, the space itself is truly unique, the ever-changing art, the chaos of the inside that never seems to intrude on the stillness of our practice."*

I joined the Gilman Sangha back in August of 2018 fresh out of rehab and after spending two years trying unsuccessfully to get sober. My experience in this Sangha kept me coming back week after week, eventually joining the inventory group and volunteering service. What I was drawn to was the non-dogmatic, non-judgmental approach and the ways I felt welcome. I was encouraged to find my own path and trust myself—something other recovery groups had taught me not to do. I also appreciated that I was encouraged to have compassion for myself and others. It brought me back to the roots of my practice. It also felt like an environment that was both trauma-informed and supportive of individuals with mental health problems. As a result, I now have the longest amount of continuous sobriety since starting this journey back in 2016. I now co-facilitate the meeting and am actively involved with our business meetings and other aspects of service.

I believe in our community and am invested in its health and well-being. I've been inspired by how our sangha meets challenges and addresses concerns within our community. Gilman Sangha feels like a supportive and encouraging family.

We get many newcomers each week. One new member shared about their first meeting experience with us: *"Kind, welcoming, challenging, without being overwhelming. This is the first meeting I've been to in any format where I felt like I could really connect with the speakers. I went there in a state of rage, gradually transforming into confusion...and left feeling "seen" and with a deep sense of relief."*

One of the beautiful things about our space is its diversity, and this is represented in our members and the speakers who share. *"When you come in to the Gilman Sangha people ask "How are you?" and you can answer with truth,"* reflected Jen. *"It feels honest and exposed and yet I said almost nothing for the first three months I attended, and that was accepted and respected as well."* Community-building is important to us and we have an informal social gathering after each meeting at a nearby café where people gather to talk, connect, eat, and knit (note that knitting is not required).

The Gilman Sangha includes an Inquiry Circle (formerly Inventory Group) that meets prior to the general meeting. This is a small group of dedicated members coming together to serve as each other's trusted friends/wise friends (*Kalyanna-mitta*). We all have various lengths of continuous sobriety and various backgrounds working with Buddhism—from brand new to many years' worth. Despite our differences, we treat each other as wise equals, respecting feedback provided by all members, and acknowledging we can all teach each other regardless of our experience. This is the spirit of Recovery Dharma (RD) and Sangha. Our pre-meeting includes a meditation, 20 minutes of either writing on the Eightfold Path (we draw one of the aspects from a hat), writing on the inquiry questions (individuals choose what they want to work on), or check-ins about where we are at in our recovery. During the weeks where we do writing, we open it up for sharing for last 20 minutes. We support each other and provide feedback. It's a discussion of shared struggle, shared wisdom, and offerings of support and compassion.



The Gilman meeting, being one of the largest Recovery Dharma meetings in the Bay Area, engages in outreach in a variety of ways. Gilman Sangha supports getting new meetings started. For example, Gilman helped start of a new dual diagnosis/mental health-focused RD meeting in Oakland, a process addiction group, and provides meetings at local inpatient facilities.

The other type of outreach the Gilman Sangha engages with is providing daylong workshops/retreats. We had an incredible daylong retreat back in April of 2019 with Jean Tuller and about 50 people in attendance. It was truly a community-building event that members of our community are still talking about! We are currently in the process of creating a spring-time daylong for 2020-a “Build-Your-Own-Meditation Practice” community wisdom workshop. The intention for this workshop will be to provide a framework of some meditation practice basics with questions posed to the community to help share wisdom, assist members in thinking about meditation in different ways, and to try out different ways of meditating and building a practice.

Our monthly business meeting usually hosts about 10 members. We have a number of volunteer positions available to ensure members are able to participate as much as they want. We unanimously voted to make the transition to RD back in August. According to one member, Lindsay, *“I began to come to Recovery Dharma in its time of transition and formation. Experiencing the ways that this group of individuals comes together to manifest ideas and opinions into what Recovery Dharma is today was inspiring as I was in my own transition of rebuilding.”*

With the recent transition to RD and all the wonderful grassroots activity that followed, the Gilman Sangha voted to create a “Sustainability Circle”—a subcommittee designated to create a proposal for how we want to govern ourselves moving forward. Given the nature of RD’s emphasis on being peer-led and leaderless, the Sustainability Circle generated a beautiful document that explored the concepts of [sociocracy](#) and consensus-based decision making and use round-robin discussions to ensure everyone has a voice. Additionally, we have begun to more clearly define roles and responsibilities

of trusted volunteers to ensure we maintain an environment as free of hierarchies as possible. Using the sociocracy framework, we are utilizing circles (or sub-committees) to work on various projects, which are then brought back to the larger business meeting for decision-making.

The beautiful thing about grassroots movements is that we all have a voice and we get to co-create this process and community as we move along the path. Transitions are challenging, but the Gilman Sangha has met each challenge with the tools outlined in the Eightfold Path. One of our long-term members, Eleanor, wrote, *“Being a member of this Gilman Sangha has given me a strong basis for all aspects of my recovery and my spiritual growth. Friends, companions, supporters, challenging situations, opportunities for growth—it’s all there. I am deeply grateful.”*

Come visit us, all are welcome!

*If you’d like to feature your sangha in the Recovery Dharma newsletter, contact us at [newsletter@recoverydharma.org](mailto:newsletter@recoverydharma.org).*



### **My Path**

Rick’s Story of Recovery

*Thank you to **Rick Millman** for this personal story of recovery.*

From early on something didn’t feel right about me. There was emotional and some physical abuse in the home. All of the relationships in my nuclear family were tarnished. I didn’t fit in at school. I had social anxiety, didn’t play sports, and got beat up a lot. When the cool kids started dating, I felt left out in the lurch. And so, I escaped my present moment experience through fantasy in its many guises. First movies, music, and daydreaming that I would be a big star of the stage and screen one day. Someday, one day.

Eventually adolescence brought more pressure on me and I felt unsuccessful in most, if not all areas of my life. I felt like I didn't fit in anywhere. Eventually, I found a group whom I thought would accept me—the “heads” as we were called. I also liked to identify myself as a hippy or freak. And I was proud of it! I experimented with marijuana, alcohol, and moved on to quaaludes and psychedelics. All of these things helped me to feel significant in the world, and comfortable in my own skin, if even for a few hours at a time. I also discovered pornography as a means to feel a sense of connection to another, however false, in the safety of my fantasies, where I could direct the scene and not get hurt.

Even back then I longed for some kind of spiritual path that would heal me. Drugs and music were my first real initiation into that world.

I was born into a secular Jewish home. We only went to synagogue on the High Holy Days, which I found incredibly boring. My parents put me into Sunday school beginning in second grade, so I would know enough to be Bar Mitzvah'd (a Jewish Rites of Passage ceremony) at the age of 13. It was the thing to do, culturally speaking.

In Sunday school, the teachers would read the stories from Genesis and Exodus. They reminded me of Grimm's Fairy Tales—only they were “grimmer,” and supposedly true! One thing they taught that made sense to me was that God was infinite. Therefore, Jewish art did not depict individual personalities as being representational of God.

My mom liked musical theater. I was eight years old in 1973 when she first took me to see Jesus Christ Superstar. I didn't understand it—this was nothing like The Sound of Music! My mom told me that there were people who believed in different religions. Christians believed that the guy I was looking at on the stage was the Son of God. Very odd and hard for me to fathom.

Then I learned that the Jews thought the Christians were wrong, and many Christians thought I was going to hell! This kind of shameful attitude did not sit right with me. My spiritual wandering went on for many years, so I turned toward the East. They were more

inclusive and non-judgmental, more accepting. As you can see, I already sensed a lot of discrepancies between the different religions, and had a hard time reconciling them.

Meanwhile, I was kind of artsy-fartsy. I wrote poems and songs. I felt a spiritual connection within music and the arts. I especially liked the Beatles. I decided that this was what I wanted to do with my life. So, I started to learn about meditation and dropped acid.

My first “drunk” happened when I was 15 years old. My parents had gone out for the evening. I went into the liquor cabinet, grabbed a flask, some orange juice and mixed it with three types of bourbons. I started feeling the effects, but even on this first try, decided that it still wasn’t enough to experience a true “drunk.” I was so soused, my sister had to help me to the bathroom where I had my first religious experience with the porcelain god. My sister was so worried about me, she slept on the floor of my room to make sure I was still alive by the next morning. I was. Barely.

That event happened on a Saturday night. I know this because the next day I had to go to Sunday school. I already hated Sunday School. Now I was REALLY hating it! I had to hide in the bathroom, swearing that I would never do that again. And I didn’t, until I discovered pot a few months later. Then I started to drink one or two beers along with the weed (my first attempt at “controlled drinking”).

I experimented with other drugs as well (especially psychedelics), but once I hit the age of 21, alcohol became my main drug of choice. I knew what time the dealer was open for business, what the cut was, AND that it was FDA approved!

While doing all of this, I was channel surfing in 1988 and came upon a special with Bill Moyers interviewing this guy who was talking about mythology. Mythology? You mean those stories of Zeus and Odysseus and stuff? Aren’t those just grown-up fairy tales? But this man wasn’t talking about that. He was talking about Native American stories, stories of the Buddha and the similarities found between the Buddha, Moses and Jesus. He taught me that it was okay to consider these stories as true when read metaphorically rather than literally and historically.

The problem was I didn't know how to put these ideas into practice. I still felt empty inside. I dabbled with yoga, Taoism, Jungian psychology, etc., but there was little follow through. Despite my research, I spent most of the time drinking from the ages of 25 – 30. By 30, I realized I was going nowhere fast, and that there had to be a better way. There were no Buddhist recovery programs around at the time, so after a few attempts at going it alone, I realized I needed help from others. So, I got sober in Alcoholics Anonymous and got into substance abuse treatment. It worked—I truly believe that any program can work if I put the energy into it, so that's exactly what I did. That was back in 1995.

More recently, (as of 2013) I have embraced Buddhism. I don't so much believe in a "higher power," but rather a **deeper** power than I can access from the inside as well as the collective wisdom of all you folks. Buddhism seems to fit that particular schema, and makes the most sense to me.

I mostly follow the Theravada school of Buddhism in the Thai Forest tradition. I joined some 12-step recovery groups that had a Buddhist orientation. Then I heard of a fellowship that did not feel a need to use the 12 steps as the "middle man." I could simply use the Buddha's path of liberation through practicing the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path and all the other practices that corresponded with them. Over the next few years I helped start some meetings in the Baltimore area. When Recovery Dharma formed in July of 2019, all of our Baltimore meetings decided to switch our affiliation with this new community.

I am also involved with the online sangha, and I must say I feel every bit as close to members of the national and international community as I do my homies. In fact, you are ALL my homies!

One of the most helpful tools I have utilized in the past few years are what are known as "The 6 Rs." I learned these after attending a 10-day online retreat with Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center. The main meditation used for this retreat was a Metta (lovingkindness) meditation. So, when I begin my meditation practice, I first begin by simply becoming aware of the breath as I breathe in and breathe out. I then say to myself

“Calming and quieting the physical activity.” Then I begin a body scan and relax the various parts of my body. Relaxing on the in breath. Relaxing on the out breath.

I then say to myself “Calming and quieting the mental activity.” As I watch the process of my mind, I get to see how there is suffering in my life (First Noble Truth), and it’s causes (Second Noble Truth.) It’s not the craving itself that causes suffering. It is the fueling of these cravings and aversions. “I want this. I don’t want this. I have to have this. I have to get away from this.” These things are going to come up. The problem is when I allow myself to get lost in the stories I create around them. (What I have just shared refers to what the Buddha called the Three poisons—greed, hatred, and delusion.)

The Third Noble Truth says that letting go of this suffering is possible. This is where the 6 Rs come in. The first R is to *Recognize* when I am beginning to get lost in the stories. Then I *Release* the thought—mid-sentence if necessary. Then I *Relax* all the areas of tension in my body that tighten up around the thought. Relaxing on the in breath. Relaxing on the out breath. The type of meditation I learned was a smiling Metta meditation. It is believed that smiling releases chemicals in the brain that correspond with joy and peace. Usually when we get lost in our delusions, we may find that we have also stopped smiling. So, the fourth R is to *Re-smile*. The fifth R is to *Return* to the object of meditation. It can be the Metta meditation, or whatever other type of meditation I am engaging in. The sixth R is to *Repeat* as necessary. I may need to do this once every 10 minutes, or 10 times every minute. It doesn’t matter. No matter how focused or out of focus I am during any given sitting, the more often I do this, the more successful I am at building my meditation muscles.

This helps me during my daily activities as well. If I am feeling angry, or craving to act out with one of my compulsive activities, such as eating and over engaging with technology, I have an opportunity to stop and use the 6 Rs as a tool for letting go.

This is one of the many ways I learn to seek refuge in the deeper power that exists inside me. It is something I learned from some wise friends, and I try to pass it along to others who are on this path of recovery.

I have not reached Nirvana—complete release from suffering (yet!). This is definitely a process, not an event. But I must say I feel more comfortable in my own skin and in my relationships with others. I am grateful to be on this journey with the rest of my homies!

*If you'd like to share your personal story with the Recovery Dharma community, contact us at [newsletter@recoverydharma.org](mailto:newsletter@recoverydharma.org). Please see the [recoverydharma.org](http://recoverydharma.org) website for guidelines.*



## **Dharma Toolbox**

Meditation Tips for Daily Sits

*Thank you to **Jer Clarke** for this article.*

Meditation takes time and effort, but the benefits are enormous. Anyone who manages to maintain a daily sitting practice is likely to sing its praises, the hard part is making time and finding the motivation to keep at it day after day.

As someone about to hit 650 days in a row of meditation (find me on Insight Timer to check!), I think maybe I have some valuable advice to give, and figured I'd write up the tips I give to new people who ask me how they can get started.

So please forgive my hubris, and may all beings meditate at ease.

### **1. First things first**

If there was just one piece of advice I could give you, it would be to meditate as early as you possibly can in the morning. I find it best when I meditate before I start working, before I talk to anyone, and most importantly, before I check Facebook!

Not only does meditating before doing anything else give me a clear mind, free from the distractions of the day, it also gives me a sense of peace and acceptance that I can bring with me to those challenges when they come up.

I invite you to do yourself a favor and schedule time for sitting before anything else in your day, and if that means getting to bed earlier, then make bedtime a priority too.

## **2. Find a position that helps rather than hurts**

I've heard people say out loud "it's just going to hurt, so be ready for it" and I have to say, I don't think we should give up so easily! Yes, when we're on a retreat meditating 10 hours a day, there will be pain for the first few days, but if we're sitting for 20-30 minutes per day, there are usually ways to get through it without major discomfort.

Of course, for those with physical limitations or chronic pain conditions, sitting might not be the best way to meditate! Lying, standing, walking and other forms of meditation are just as valid. Do your best to honor and listen to your body and find a position that works.

Assuming sitting is a position that works, try making sure the back is straight and your ears, shoulders, and hips are aligned to the best of your ability.

If sitting on a cushion, make sure your butt is elevated enough compared to your feet, so that your legs make a ramp to the ground.

If that doesn't work, a nice firm chair that keeps your back straight and lets your knees bend at 90° is a good option as well.

[This "About Posture" PDF by Stephanie Nash](#) helped me a lot in resolving my many painful problems with meditation. In it you can learn about different positions, types of cushion, and likely problems. It took me months before I was able to figure out what works for my body, but the effort was definitely worth it.

If your meditation hurts you day after day, know that you deserve better.

## **3. Keep the lights on**



Some people feel that meditating in the dark helps them clear their mind, and some schools even teach that it's vital to the practice. From my own experience, I'm here to tell you the opposite, especially if you ever have problems with sleepiness during meditation.

When I close my eyes in the dark, it's no surprise my brain thinks it's time for bed! Yes we can train ourselves out of this eventually, but why go through that?

If it's daytime and there's a window, open the curtains and sit facing the daylight, I bet it will feel good and help you stay alert. If it's nighttime, turn on the lights and point yourself towards a lamp.

In my experience great meditation is like great sex: It's better with the lights on!

#### **4. Nowhere else you need to be, nothing else you need to do**

One of the biggest challenges I faced when I started meditating was impatience. When I sit still and be quiet, my brain goes into overdrive, thinking of all the other things I should be doing, like chores, work, writing that book, etc. It can feel like I'm wasting my time sitting there when I could be doing something more productive. This can lead me to spend the whole meditation thinking about other things, and ultimately avoiding the mindfulness of the present moment that was my actual goal.

If this comes up for you, try reminding yourself that there's nowhere else you need to be, and nothing else you need to do.

This reminder can completely change our relationship to the time we spend meditating, from something we wait through to something we take full advantage of.

You already made the decision to meditate, and you had good reasons! Have trust in

yourself and in the value of meditation to improve your life. Let the past and the future have their time later, meditation time is dedicated to the present moment.

### **5. Any sit you finish is a good sit**

This is simple advice and I encourage you to take it literally. It's very tempting to assign value to our different meditation sessions: This one was good, I had a lot of concentration, that last one was bad, I was distracted the whole time!

Resist that urge! Let each meditation be whatever it is, and approach the experience with acceptance. Judging our practice is one of the fastest roads to getting discouraged and losing the impetus of a daily practice.

Instead, try to be mindful of how each meditation goes, and use that information to better understand yourself. Maybe it was hard because you've got a lot going on right now. If that's the case, you probably needed that meditation more than ever!

Allow your practice to have ups and downs without judging yourself or getting discouraged. Meditation is always valuable, especially when we are facing big challenges in life and practice.

### **6. Be choiceless**

My last piece of advice is both the simplest in theory and probably the hardest in practice. But if you can pull it off, it can support a daily practice you can rely on and benefit from. Being "choiceless" means not negotiating about a decision once it's made, and in this case, that decision can be to have a daily practice. When we're choiceless, we don't let excuses, circumstances, or anything else get in the way. We just make time for meditation, and then we meditate!

Choicelessness is how we can maintain abstinence from drugs and alcohol, learn a new language, or achieve many seemingly-impossible goals. Maybe some days we don't have time for a full 20-30 minute sit, but we still make time for meditation, even if it's just 5-10

minutes in the morning.

Of course, choicelessness doesn't mean beating yourself up if you miss a day. We should always be compassionate and understanding with ourselves. One day at a time, we can keep making good decisions that support our practice and our recovery.

Meditating whether we "want" to or not is a key skill to develop, because often the times when we need meditation the most are the same times when we are desperate to skip it. Be choiceless in your commitment to a daily meditation practice, and you'll free yourself from the suffering of having to re-decide each day to do something you know is good for you.

Alright, there you go! I hope you find these tips helpful, and I wish you peace and compassion on your journey of meditation and mindfulness!

[Licensed as Creative Commons BY-NC-SA.](#) Do you have a practice technique or approach that might be featured in Dharma Toolbox? Please send your submissions (about 500 words) to [newsletter@recoverydharma.org](mailto:newsletter@recoverydharma.org).



## **Between the Lines**

The Recovery Dharma Newsletter Book Review

*Thanks to Dave Slavik for this book review.*

This is the 3rd book of David Michie's Dalai Lama's Cat series, yet each book stands on its own as a wonderful read of life from the perspective of HHC (His Holiness' Cat), his time in the presence of the Dalai Lama, and all the people of his small mountain monastery and town.

The Power of Meow follows the growth of HHC and the Dalai Lama's other, human students as they learn mindfulness and meditation. Each story is well thought out, believable, and focuses on a teachable moment. Teachings touch on topics as varied as

anger at a partner, frustration with a relative, and feelings of low self worth. Each presents Buddhist principles to the reader, and further cements our connection to the story and its characters as they grow, improve, and work their way down their own path to awakening.

This book presents Buddhist wisdom to the reader in subtle ways – it doesn't force ideas upon you; rather, it whispers them in your ear. If you are willing to listen, there is much to be learned about samsara, mindfulness, meditation, wise speech, and so much more. This book would be enjoyable to read even without the Buddhist perspective because it still gives the reader many valuable tips about navigating the ups and downs of life.

My only complaint with the book is that it was over too quickly. I became absorbed in the story and wanted to rush through it all in one sitting, but found myself purposely slowing down to make the experience last longer—yes, there was definitely some clinging/attachment involved!

For those interested in Buddhist history, I was surprised to find many pages devoted to the evolution of the practice, the history of previous Dalai Lamas, and even some “flashbacks” into previous incarnations that give insights into the goings-on of times gone by.

As a cat servant myself, I found the author's portrayal of the feline mindset to be hilariously spot-on. As a practitioner of Buddhist principles, I enjoyed the meditation instructions from a cat's perspective.

Overall, this book (and series) is a perfect introduction for someone looking to explore Buddhism. Meditation tips, mantras, history, and even the psychological why and how of meditation is all touched upon in a manner appropriate for both the experienced and the novice.

*If you'd like to submit an article for the Recovery Dharma Newsletter, contact us at [newsletter@recoverydharma.org](mailto:newsletter@recoverydharma.org). Please see <https://recoverydharma.org/newsletters> for guidelines.*

*The Recovery Dharma Newsletter Sub-Circle consists of Amy Reed, Dirk Wethington, and Critter Spinneret. We welcome your feedback and submissions of all kinds! Questions, comments, and*

submissions can be sent to [newsletter@recoverydharma.org](mailto:newsletter@recoverydharma.org). With metta, may all beings be at peace and free from suffering.

*The Inclusion Circle reviewed, provided suggestions, and approved this issue of the Recovery Dharma newsletter in order to encourage inclusivity, accessibility, and diversity. To bring up any questions or comments related to inclusion, please contact [rdinclusioncircle@gmail.com](mailto:rdinclusioncircle@gmail.com).*