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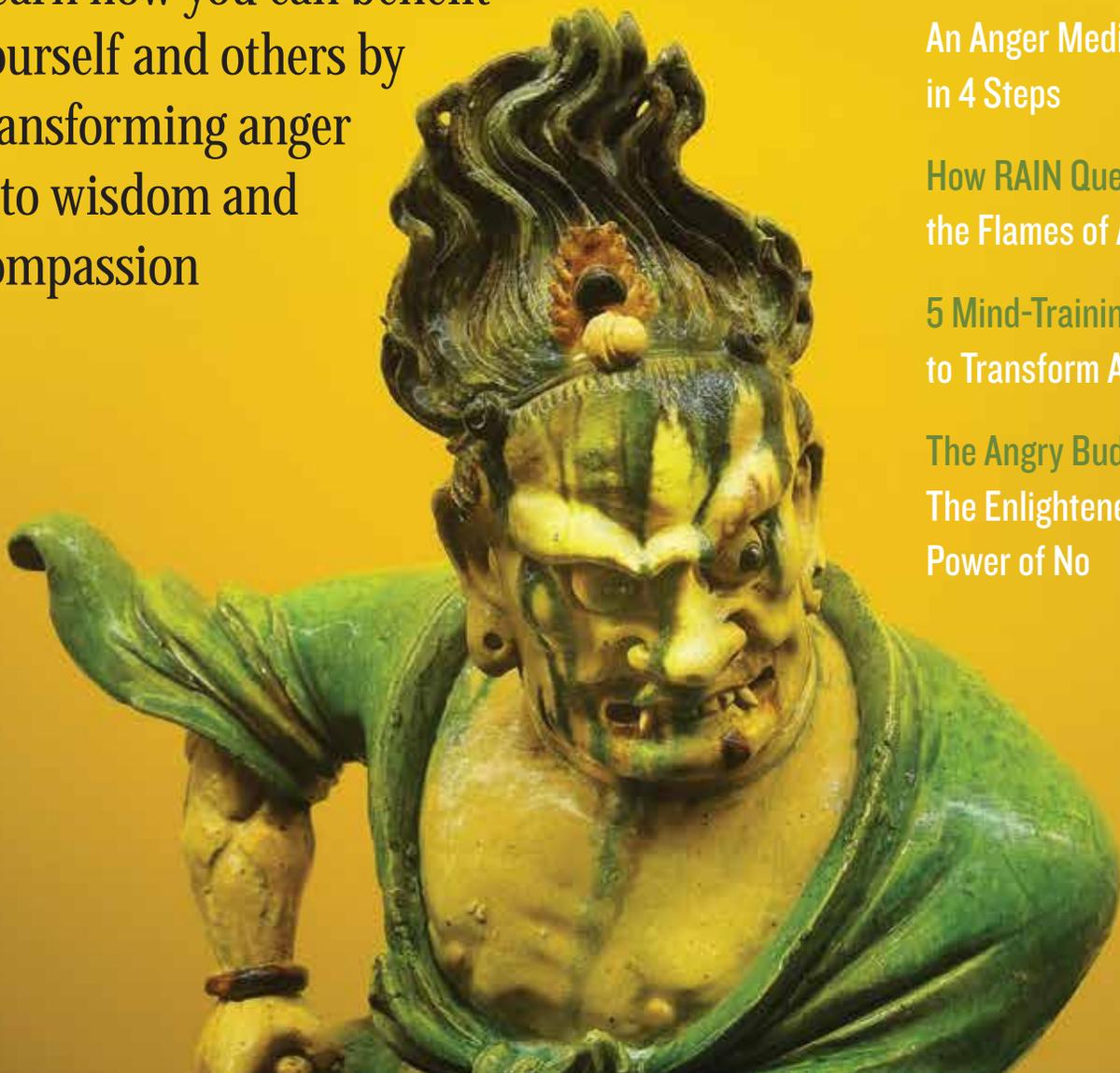
SHAMBHALA SUN

BUDDHISM CULTURE MEDITATION LIFE

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The **Wisdom** of **Anger**

Learn how you can benefit yourself and others by transforming anger into wisdom and compassion



The Poison Tree
An Anger Meditation
in 4 Steps

How RAIN Quells
the Flames of Anger

5 Mind-Training Slogans
to Transform Anger

The Angry Buddha
The Enlightened
Power of No

A REFUGE

from Addiction



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Taking refuge in the Buddha means taking refuge from our suffering. **NOAH LEVINE** uses Buddhist principles and meditation practices to help people take refuge from the terrible suffering of substance abuse.

To End the Suffering: The Eightfold Path of Recovery

ACTIVE ADDICTION is a kind of hell. It is like being a hungry ghost, wandering through life in constant craving and suffering. Refuge Recovery, a Buddhist-inspired approach to treating addiction, offers a plan to end the suffering of addiction.

Refuge Recovery follows the traditional Buddhist system of the four noble truths, which begin with four actions:

1. We take stock of all the suffering we have experienced and caused as addicts.
2. We investigate the causes and conditions that lead to addiction and begin the process of letting go.
3. We come to understand that recovery is possible and take refuge in the path that leads to the end of addiction.
4. We engage in the process of the eightfold path that leads to recovery.

The core philosophy of Refuge Recovery is based on renunciation and abstinence. We believe that the recovery process truly begins when renunciation is established and maintained.

We also understand that imperfection and humility are part of the process. Even when we refrain from the primary drug or behavior, addiction at times manifests in other behaviors. We are not holding perfection as the standard, but as the goal. We believe in the human ability and potential for complete renunciation of behaviors that cause harm. We understand that for many this is an ongoing process of establishing and/or reestablishing renunciation.

Adapted from *Refuge Recovery: A Buddhist Path to Recovering from Addiction*, by Noah Levine. © 2014 by Noah Levine. With permission of HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

Renunciation alone is not recovery, however. It is only the beginning. Those who maintain abstinence but fail to examine the underlying causes and conditions are not on the path to recovery. They are simply stopping the surface manifestations of addiction, which will inevitably resurface in other ways.

The eight factors, or folds, of the path are to be developed, experienced, and penetrated. This is not a linear path. It does not have to be taken in order. In fact, all the factors need to be developed and applied simultaneously. And to truly break free from addiction, the eight folds of recovery must be constantly maintained.

This eightfold path leads to safety, to a refuge from addiction:

1. Understanding. We come to know that everything is ruled by cause and effect. The four truths are an ongoing practice. In this step, we gain insight into the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and impersonal nature of life. Forgiveness is possible and necessary.

2. Intention. We renounce greed, hatred, and delusion. We train our minds to meet all pain with compassion and all pleasure with nonattached appreciation. We cultivate generous, kind, and compassionate wishes for all living beings. We practice honesty and humility and live with integrity.

3. Communication/Community. We take refuge in the community as a place to practice wise communication and to support others on their paths. We practice being honest, wise, and careful with our communications, asking for help from the community and allowing others



to guide us through the process. We practice openness, honesty, and humility about the difficulties and successes we experience.

4. Action/Engagement. We purify our actions, letting go of the behaviors that cause harm. The minimum commitment necessary for the path toward recovery and freedom is renunciation of violence, of dishonesty, of sexual misconduct, and of intoxication. Compassion, nonattached appreciation, generosity, kindness, honesty, integrity, and service become our guiding principles.

5. Livelihood/Service. We try to be of service to others whenever possible, using our time, energy, and resources to help create positive change. We work toward securing a source of income/livelihood that causes no harm.

6. Effort/Energy. We commit to the daily disciplined practices of meditation, yoga, exercise, wise actions, kindness, forgive-

ness, generosity, compassion, appreciation, and the moment-to-moment mindfulness of feelings, emotions, thoughts, and sensations. Through effort and energy we develop the skillful means of knowing how to apply the appropriate meditation or action to the given circumstance.

7. Mindfulness Meditations. We develop wisdom through practicing formal mindfulness meditation. This leads to seeing clearly and healing the root causes and conditions that lead to the suffering of addiction. We practice present-time awareness in all aspects of our life. We take refuge in the present.

8. Concentration Meditations. We develop the capacity to focus the mind on a single object, such as the breath or a phrase, training the mind through the practices of loving-kindness, compassion, and forgiveness to focus on the positive qualities we seek to uncover. We utilize concentration at times of temptation or craving in order to abstain from acting unwisely.

Definitions

Addiction is the repetitive process of habitually satisfying cravings to avoid, change, or control the seemingly unbearable conditions of the present moment. This process of craving and indulgence provides short-term relief but causes long-term harm. It is almost always a source of suffering for both the addict and those who care about the addict.

Recovery is a process of healing the underlying conditions that lead to addiction. It is establishing and maintaining the practice of abstaining from satisfying the cravings for the substances and behaviors that we have become addicted to. Recovery is also the ability to inhabit the conditions of the present reality, whether pleasant or unpleasant.

Renunciation is the practice of abstaining from harmful behaviors.

A **refuge** is a safe place, a place of protection—a place that we go to in times of need, a shelter. We are always taking refuge in something. Drugs, alcohol, food, sex, money, or relationships with people have been a refuge for many of us. Before addiction, such refuges provide temporary feelings of comfort and safety. But at some point we crossed the line into addiction. And the substances or behaviors that were once a refuge inevitably became a dark and lonely repetitive cycle of searching for comfort as we wandered through an empty life.

Not Too Tight, Not Too Loose: Recovery Practice

RECOVERY IS AN ACT of intentional redirection of our life's energy. This is where the intentional application of energy comes into play. Everything we are talking about takes effort. None of these practices or principles are easy to develop. We all have the energy necessary for this, but only with wise and intentional use of that energy—that is, with effort—can we master these liberating practices and avoid the habitual reactive tendencies that create more addiction and suffering in our lives.

When it comes to training our minds and hearts in the path of recovery, each of us must find the balance of applying the right amount of effort: not so much that we get strained, not so little that we get spaced out. Developing a balanced effort and energy in our spiritual life is key to our recovery.

The Buddha likened spiritual effort to the tuning of a stringed instrument. If the strings are too tight, it doesn't play correctly. If the strings are too loose, it doesn't sound right either. The path to recovery and freedom takes great effort and fine-tuning.

Here are some suggested guidelines for developing a recovery practice:

From the beginning: Start with the practice of meditation right away. Meditation is the most important tool in supporting your renunciation and beginning your recovery. Begin with simple breath awareness concentration practice. After a week or so of renunciation/abstinence, begin to alternate forgiveness meditation with breath practice every other day.

2 to 6 months: Meditate for twenty minutes daily. Go to as many meetings and meditation groups as you can. Ask someone from the recovery community to mentor you and call him or her regularly to check in about your practice of the four truths. Complete your first truth and second truth inventories. Perform weekly physical practices like yoga, dance, or other exercises with mindfulness.

6 to 12 months: Increase your meditation practice to thirty minutes a day, and begin expanding the mindfulness practice to include forgiveness practice in your meditation for at least fifteen minutes every other day until you have no more resentments. Attend a weekend retreat. Begin making amends as part of the forgiveness process.

1 to 5 years: Begin daily meditation of forty-five minutes in one sitting or split into one thirty-minute and one fifteen-minute session. After the first year of renunciation/sobriety/abstinence, begin practicing the four foundations of mindfulness and the heart practices of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciation, and equanimity. Incorporate more and more mindfulness and heart practice in daily life. Complete the amends process. Attend a seven- to ten-day silent meditation retreat yearly. After completing a retreat and finishing your amends, begin mentoring others. Do an annual inventory on your recovery, looking at how you are currently engaging with the four truths and the eightfold path. Where are the weak links? What needs more attention and effort?

5 years to life: Stay involved, continue to practice, and share your experience, time, and energy with the newer people. Include the forgiveness practice in your meditation for at least fifteen minutes every other day until you have no more resentments. Try to attend a longer retreat that is one to three months in length. Continue to do an annual inventory on your recovery, looking at how you are currently engaging with the four truths and the eightfold path. Where are the weak links? What needs more attention and effort?

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Opening the Meeting: The Refuge Recovery Preamble

“REFUGE RECOVERY is a community of people who are using the practices of mindfulness, compassion, forgiveness, and generosity to heal the pain and suffering that addiction has caused in our lives and the lives of our loved ones. The path of practice that we follow is called the Four Truths of Refuge Recovery.

“The Four Truths of Refuge Recovery is a Buddhist-oriented path to recovery from addictions. It has proven successful with addicts and alcoholics who have committed to the Buddhist path of meditation, generosity, kindness, and renunciation.

“This is an approach to recovery that understands that ‘All beings have the power and potential to free themselves from suffering.’

“We feel confident in the power of the Buddha’s teachings, if applied, to relieve suffering of all kinds, including the suffering of addiction.”



PHOTO BY JOZSEF SZASZ-FABIAN / DREAMSTIME.COM

Diagnosed with the Human Condition: Mary’s Story

FORMAL BUDDHIST PRACTICE took the recovery program I had developed through the 12 steps and my own experience and sharpened it to a precision edge. Ideas that were partially formed before, such as staying in the now and being with life as it unfolded, came into focus and were outlined and delineated in such a way that I couldn’t imagine this practice not being a part of recovery or of my life. These practices became tools to use to continue the journey. I had been floundering for a few years, and now, finally, the path had been opened. And the work was just beginning.

I have hit wall after wall in practice. Daily meditation and extended periods on retreat have helped melt the barriers that self-preservation built. For the first time, I started to look at the impact my early years had on me, and, through meditation, I was able to sit and begin to see how those experiences conditioned me in a way that I could not have seen otherwise. I had spent my whole life in my head. I kept turning to food or drugs or alcohol to keep the pain away. With meditation I allowed the feelings to arise and learned to be quiet with them. For so many years I had listened to the stories in my head, and although I knew they were false and I tried to power my way through them, I couldn’t.

Occasionally I had breakthroughs where the experience moved from the mind to the heart, but here were tools I could use specifically to address my recovery. Not just recovery from my physical addictions, but tools to enable me to heal at a deeper level. The walls I put in place began to dissolve with the patient application of mindfulness. The willingness to look at what arose inside, whether it matched the story in my head or not, was the effort the Buddha talked about that was necessary for liberation.

The Buddha taught that we don’t get out of this life without pain, but I had spent my whole life avoiding it. I was diagnosed with the human condition and finally was able to turn and face the pain. The grasping for something out there

to fix me was never going to work. Turning inside to heal is where the practice occurs. The first healing was internal. I learned it was not self-indulgent to bring compassion to your own experience. In fact, it was the answer. Not lame, but strong. Oh, who knew? Grief, anger, and shame saw the light of day for the first time, and I welcomed them.

But this is not a practice that promises instant gratification or permanent bliss. As I continue to live and breathe and stay willing, mindfulness and effort allow more insights. I hit another wall a few years later and found that the old ideas of self were still strong. They still kept me from connecting with others. I went into therapy to help me clearly see what was keeping me from other people. Another wall came down.

Nothing in my past has changed. Nothing about my story has changed. What has changed is my ability to see the habitual patterns of thinking that kept me suffering, dissatisfied or stressed, or off-kilter—or however you want to translate *dukkha*. My perception of the facts is ever-shifting. My ideas are dissolving. The practice requires a continual effort to feel what-

ever arises in each moment. Continued focus on each moment requires more and more subtlety and feeling of each moment. “What is this?” becomes the question of the moment, every moment. And the new response is kindness rather than a search for a way out of the present, however justified it may seem at the moment. It’s okay to receive a diagnosis that reads, “Human condition.” In fact, it’s the only response that allows the connection with others I didn’t even know I was missing.

Today, I continue the work on the path and I continue to uncover my heart’s true nature as I cultivate a mind-body connection that responds to life with love and compassion. The judgmental and belittling voices still show up, but I say hello and let them continue on their way. I now feel ease and comfort while experiencing life as it unfolds, along with a deep knowing that drinking or drugging or eating or anything will not fix what’s not broken. ♦



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