



*The Road Home: A Contemporary Exploration of the Buddhist Path*  
by Ethan Nichtern  
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**Introduction: *Where Do You Live?***

- 1) What is your personal experience of home, both externally and internally? And what is your experience of being a “commuter?”
- 2) How does the confusion of a life lost in commute relate, for you, to the three types of materialism (physical, intellectual, and emotional/spiritual)?
- 3) What did the Tibetan Lama who hates small talk say to Ethan’s father, David? How can we make use of this one-line response in your own life?
- 4) How do you relate to the full, literal translation of Buddhism as “Awake-ism?”

**Chapter 1: *Meditation – Accepting Your Own Friend Request***

- 1) Discuss the two definitions of meditation (cultivation and familiarization). How are each of these aspects present in the chapter’s title?
- 2) What are your own personal obstacles to starting (or deepening, or getting back into) a meditation practice? How are you working with these?

**Chapter 2: *Karma – Taking Responsibility for Home***

- 1) What are some common misconceptions of karma? How does Ethan propose we examine the topic?
- 2) Using the diagram of the 12 steps of karma, trace your way through a small habit or reaction (it could be as simple as the way you use your smart phone, for example, probably better to start with relatively light issues) – how does the past influence the present in this habitual pattern?

- 3) Using that same habit or reaction, reflect and discuss on what resting in the GAP might mean with respect to this issue, both in meditation practice and in the flow of daily life.

### **Chapter 3: *Coming Home 24/7/365 – Ethics in Everyday Life***

- 1) Which if any, of the three reactions to ethical discussions (apathy, defensiveness, righteousness) resonates with you?
- 2) Take on one of the five ethical contemplations to consider and practice with for a period of time between 1 and 7 days. What are the specific, real world applications of this general contemplation for you? Do you notice any of the three obstacles above in relation to the practice you chose?

### **Chapter 4: *Being Human – Buddha Nature and the Cocoon***

- 1) What is the problem of “unicorn abuse?” How does it relate to mistaken understandings of the “ego?”
- 2) What is the relationship between Basic Goodness and “living in the center of your awareness?”

### **Chapter 5: *Where I End and You Begin***

- 1) What is your experience of post meditation in relationships? In what ways is post-meditation a different practice for you than formal meditation? In what ways do the principals of meditation apply to dealing with other human (or sentient) beings?
- 2) What does it mean that Mahayana meditations are about “Changing your Freudian Slip?”

### **Chapter 6: *Ears, Mouth, and Fingertips – Communicating with Mindfulness***

- 1) What is the importance of listening in relationship to right speech? How do you experience the four obstacles to listening in your own life?
- 2) How do you relate to right speech with regards to all the various forms of technological communication available to us in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century?

### **Chapter 7: *Spiritual Bypassing – What Emptiness Means and What it Doesn't***

- 1) How can we make the teachings on emptiness a practical lesson (or lessons) to be remembered in daily life, instead of an abstract philosophy?
- 2) How do you relate to the danger of spiritual bypassing in your practice?

### **Chapter 8: *A Bodhisattva's Boundaries – Compassion, Idiot Compassion, And Knowing The Difference***

- 1) What do you find inspiring about the commitment to becoming a Bodhisattva? What do you find challenging or overwhelming about it?
- 2) Discuss one of the four types of “idiot compassion” in your daily experience.

### ***Chapter 9: Eye To Eye – The Student-Teacher Relationship***

- 1) What is your experience of seeking guidance, teachers or a guru for your spiritual journey? Discuss your understanding of the three types of teacher relationships.
- 2) Discuss your understanding of the problem with strict patriarchies in a student-teacher relationship, as well as your experience of no hierarchy, each person relying solely on their own or “group” wisdom without looking to a teacher or leader for guidance. What sort of hierarchy feels the most helpful to your process as a student?

### ***Chapter 10: Religion, Secularism, And A Sacred Path***

- 1) What is your relationship to the question of whether or not Buddhism should be regarded as a religion?
- 2) What is the relationship between “sacredness” and the social and spiritual ceremonies which make up our lives in the modern world?

### ***Chapter 11: Imagining a Basically Good Home – The Practice of Visualization***

- 1) Discuss the following statement from the chapter: “Our minds aren’t only innately perceptive, they are also naturally projective.”
- 2) Which of the three approaches to visualization’s effectiveness resonates with you? Do any of them challenge you?

### ***Chapter 12: Sacred Emotions, Sacred Environment***

- 1) Choose any one of the five major emotions discussed in this chapter and describe how viewing that feeling as “sacred” might change your relationship to it.
- 2) What is the relationship between our inner transformation and our experience of the external environment, or the relationship between windhorse and drala within the Shambhala teachings?

### ***Chapter 13: The Wisdom of No Escape from the World***

- 1) How does living in a modern, globalized world change the approach of our practice? In what ways is our journey of awakening the same as it was 2600 years ago?
- 2) How do you view the three levels of practice as a template for being in the world as a modern practitioner?

#### **Chapter 14: *Scared World vs. Sacred World – 3 S's and 3 C's***

- 1) What do the 3 C's and the 3 S's have to do with the classical Buddhist teaching called the 3 poisons? How do you understand the relationship between working with personal karma and social karma?
- 2) Big question: From the standpoint of Awake-ism, how would you define what it means to be an "activist?" Do you consider yourself one?

#### **Chapter 15: *The Culture of Awakening – Art and Transformation***

- 1) Why do you think "Dharma Art" is considered such a key element of social and cultural transformation? How does an Awake-ist relate to the intention behind creative practice?
- 2) Ethan describes his first childhood poetry lesson from Allen Ginsberg as a "lineage transmission." Can you think of a similar cultural or artistic transmission that you have received from an elder, mentor, or teacher? How do such artistic or cultural transmissions deepen our understanding of the spiritual path and of enlightened society?

#### **Chapter 16: *Conclusion – Coming Home***

- 1) What inspires and challenges you about the possibility of identifying as a Buddhist in the modern world? Do you identify as a Buddhist? Why or why not?
- 2) One of Ethan's teachers said that "There should be no sign" that one is a Buddhist. How can this idea inform your Buddhist, or Awake-ist, practice?
- 3) Having finished reading *The Road Home: A Contemporary Exploration of the Buddhist Path*, what are your aspirations and intentions for your own meditation practice? Your spiritual path? Your life?