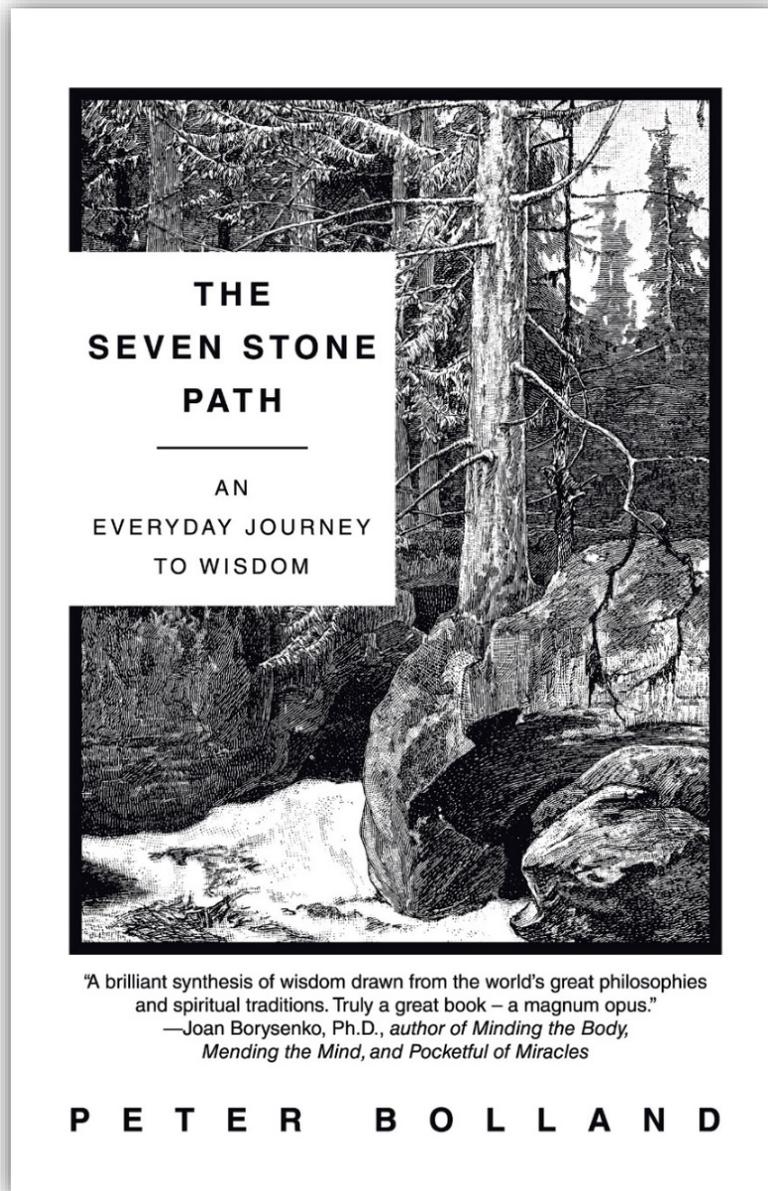


The Seven Stone Path

Workbook

Discussion Questions, Exercises, and Journaling Prompts



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How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is designed to guide you through a study of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*. Whether you are working alone or in a group, use these discussion questions, exercises, and journaling prompts to bring the book's ideas to life.

Each chapter of this workbook contains two sections: *Starting Out* and *Going Deeper*. *Starting Out* offers a few discussion questions to begin the conversation. For those interested in more, *Going Deeper* leads you through a detailed study of all of the book's ideas.

What you hold in your hand is simply a list of suggestions. Engage with as few or as many of the questions as you like. Make the process your own. In fact, the most important questions may not even be in this workbook. As you read *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom* your own questions will emerge. You might even be moved to write them down, creating your own series of exercises and prompts. In the end, both your questions and the ones in this workbook are simply starting points. Let your wandering lead you. Wisdom is an activity, not a disembodied collection of abstractions. We make the path by walking.

As we do this important work, in solitude or in community, we begin to clear the way for embodied wisdom to arise from where it has been hiding all along—deep within us. The seers and sages of the world's wisdom traditions were ordinary people like us. They simply paid attention a little differently than we do. And they took the time to inquire, contemplate, and wrestle with truth. So should we. The teachings they left behind have the capacity to awaken us from our complacency, distractedness, and confusion. But only if we engage with them in dialogue.

Set aside some time. Retreat. Gather friends together in a discussion group. Build a schedule. Read *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom* together, and use this workbook to unpack each chapter. Move at your own pace—there's no hurry. Your meaningful dialogue and soul-sharing around these questions will germinate the universal insights of the world's wisdom traditions and root them deeply into your everyday life.

Discussing and investigating these universal ideas will stir memories, spark connections, and deepen relationships—with each other, with the cosmos, and with the fragmented parts of ourselves longing for integration. As we walk this path together we will gradually come to view the world with new eyes, and with a more open heart. We will fall back in love with the world, with one another, and with our own messy, imperfect lives. Our wounds are deep, but philosophy

has the capacity to restore us. Wisdom is what healing feels like. Let us walk each other home to the wholeness of our own infinite significance.

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Introduction: The Beginning of Wisdom

• Starting Out

General discussion questions to open things up:

1. In your opinion, what is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?
2. Describe the qualities of a wise person. What would they be like?
3. Which qualities of wisdom would you most like to acquire or embody?
4. In the pursuit of wisdom, why is humility and the admission of ignorance so essential?
5. What happens when you don't have wisdom? What challenges or dysfunctions are you more susceptible to?

• Going Deeper

For a more detailed study of the Introduction of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*:

1. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? (xix-xx)
2. Read aloud and discuss the eight questions on page xxi regarding the qualities of a wise person. Before answering these questions too quickly, be sure to allow time for reflection and contemplation.
3. Read aloud and discuss the description of a wise person at the top of page xxii. Is it accurate? What qualities would you add or remove?
4. What is the connection between wisdom and humility? (xxii-xxiii)
5. If Socrates was truly the “wisest man in Athens,” as the Oracle of Delphi declared, then what does that tell us about wisdom? (xxiii-xxvi)
6. Why do you think the story of Socrates became such a core touchstone of the entire Western philosophical tradition? (xxiii-xxvi)
7. Why must wisdom begin with an admission of ignorance? (xxvi-xxviii)
8. Discuss the Zen story of the two monks and the geisha. What do you think are the most important takeaways? (xxxviii-xxx)

9. What does the following statement mean to you? “Wisdom is a way of being in the world, and not just an intellectual construct.” Restate it in your own words and discuss.
10. Discuss how the seven stones—acceptance, surrender, engagement, allowance, enjoyment, love, and integration—are like the seeds, buds, blossoms, and fruits of an apple tree. What are the deeper meanings and implications of this analogy?
11. As a journaling exercise, explore your own journey through the landscape of knowledge and wisdom. How did you come to know the things you know? What do we really know with certainty, if anything? Is uncertainty such a bad thing, given what we’ve learned in the introduction?
12. What other lingering issues or challenges in this chapter require more investigation and examination?

The First Stone

Chapter 1: Wisdom as Acceptance

● Starting Out

General discussion questions to open things up:

1. Describe your relationship with impermanence. Are you okay with it, or does it elicit fear and anxiety?
2. In your experience, is much of our anxiety and suffering caused by our own unmet expectations? Can you share an example of this dynamic from your own life?
3. If this is true, then how might we reduce our anxiety and suffering?
4. What practices do you follow to reduce your anxiety and suffering?
5. How would it *feel* if you simply began accepting the conditions and circumstances of your life?

● Going Deeper

For a more detailed study of Chapter 1 of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*:

1. When Buddha said that “all forms are impermanent,” was that an optimistic or pessimistic statement? Is impermanence good news or bad news? Why? (1-2)
2. How does resentment and craving rob us of the beauty of this present moment? (2-3)
3. Restate the Four Noble Truths in your own words. Can you think of any examples from your own life where craving and attachment generated anxiety and suffering? (3-5)
4. What is Buddha’s suggestion for the reduction of anxiety and suffering? (3-5)
5. Reflect and discuss each of the eight suggestions on the Noble Eightfold Path. How would these shifts in consciousness, action, and practice reduce our self-centeredness, thereby reducing our anxiety and suffering? (5-9)
6. At this point in our study, discuss how your understanding of the idea of acceptance is evolving.
7. What does the story of Steve teach us about the power of acceptance? (10-11)

8. Discuss Krishnamurti's statement, "I don't mind what happens." Is it a statement of emotional indifference, or of liberating presence? Why? (12)
9. Since understanding attachment is essential to our understanding of acceptance, what are some of the many forms attachment takes in our lives? (13-14)
10. Summarize the deeper meaning of "nirvana." How is it connected to the experience of aversion and craving, and how is it connected to the consciousness of acceptance? (15-18)
11. What are some of the meanings of the kingdom of heaven as it appears in the gospels? (18-20)
12. What do the Buddhist concept of nirvana and the Christian concept of the kingdom of heaven have in common? (20-22)
13. Summarize the key ideas of the Stoic philosophy of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. How do these ideas align with what we've learned so far about the consciousness of acceptance? (22-26)
14. Epictetus wrote, "Embrace what you actually get." How would your life be different if you followed his advice? (24)
15. Make two lists—one with all the things you can control, the other with all the things you can't. How might this exercise enhance and deepen your embodiment of the consciousness of acceptance? (25)
16. In the Bhagavad Gita, the protagonist Arjuna represents all of us—ordinary people on the field of action caught between a rock and a hard place. What two essential insights does Krishna teach Arjuna? How might these realizations help us navigate our difficult choices? (29-32)
17. Discuss the section called "Acceptance Is Not Indifference." How does this distinction help us clarify what acceptance does and does not mean? (33-34)
18. As a journaling exercise, bring to mind a situation in your life you have trouble accepting. As you reflect on your resistance, apply the insights of Stoicism, Buddhism, and/or the Bhagavad Gita, and write about what starts to come up.
19. Read aloud the seven statements in the section called "A Wise Person." Which of these seven qualities seem most important? (34-35)
20. If you are in a group, ask for a volunteer to read aloud the "Closing Meditation" while others close their eyes and deepen into the embodiment of acceptance. (35-37)

21. Conversely, if you are alone, use the voice memo function of your phone to record yourself reading the closing meditation aloud, then listen to the recording with your eyes closed.
(35-37)
22. What other lingering issues or challenges in this chapter require more investigation and examination?

The Second Stone

Chapter 2: Wisdom as Surrender

● Starting Out

General discussion questions to open things up:

1. In our ordinary way of thinking, the word “surrender” has negative connotations. Discuss these negative connotations, and flip it around—under what conditions might surrendering be an empowering act?
2. Acknowledging that it is difficult to talk about, what is your current understanding of God or ultimate reality? Has this view changed through the years? How?
3. Is our idea of God the same thing as God? Why or why not?
4. How is the idea of surrender interwoven with our conception of ultimate reality?
5. How might the consciousness of surrender be connected with wisdom?

● Going Deeper

For a more detailed study of Chapter 2 of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*:

1. In the section called “Undefeated” we confront the misleading assumption that to surrender is to fail. Restate the argument that surrender is not weakness. Describe a time in your life when surrender actually empowered you by releasing you from debilitating anxiety or over-thinking. (41-42)
2. Whether or not you have ever practiced yoga, discuss the section called “Breathe Into It.” If we reframe surrender as releasing resistance, how might it benefit us in other areas of our life? (42-43)
3. The consciousness of conflict requires there to be an *other*, an enemy to oppose. Discuss how the consciousness of surrender is instead rooted in a non-dualistic worldview, that is, the idea that all is one. (43-45)
4. The section called “Surrender to What?” is an in-depth discussion of ultimate reality and the many ways it is conceptualized. Write down your own personal definition of God or

ultimate reality, and share it with the group. What questions arise as you read this section? (45-56)

5. If ultimate reality is beyond all words and concepts, then what is the real purpose of our religious ideologies? (45-56)
6. Discuss the following sentence from page 55: “The entire dynamic of surrender shifts when we realize that the power we are surrendering to is not an external overlord but an internal presence.” Have you ever experienced ultimate reality as an internal presence?
7. In the section called “No-Seeking,” what is the fundamental problem with the concept of spiritual seeking? (56-57)
8. Summarize how the concept of surrender is at the root of the recovery movement.
9. If you have personal experience with AA, NA, or any other 12-step program, and are willing to break your anonymity, what would you be willing to share with the group about the paradox of how surrender empowered you?
10. In Confucian philosophy, *shu* or empathy is built on a willingness to surrender self-interest for the common good, making surrender the core of Confucian morality. Describe an incident where you surrendered self-interest in favor of helping others. (62-65)
11. It’s very important to understand what surrender does *not* mean. In your own words summarize the paragraph on page 66 that begins with the words, “Surrender does not mean...”
12. Discuss how the St. Francis prayer exemplifies the consciousness of surrender. (67-69)
13. Write down Father Mychal Judge’s prayer in your journal or in your notes. How does his story, and his prayer, exemplify the consciousness of surrender? (69-72)
14. Go around the group and read aloud all ten statements in the section called “A Wise Person.” Which of these qualities seems most important? (79-80)
15. Invite a volunteer to read aloud “The Closing Meditation” as the other group members close their eyes and deepen into the embodied awareness of surrender. (80-83)
16. Conversely, if you are alone, use the voice memo function of your phone to record yourself reading the closing meditation aloud, then listen to the recording with your eyes closed. (80-83)
17. What other lingering issues or challenges in this chapter require more investigation and examination?

The Third Stone

Chapter 3: Wisdom as Engagement

● Starting Out

General discussion questions to open things up:

1. We recognize that contemplation, reflection, and discernment are vitally important. Nevertheless, discuss how none of these bear fruit without meaningful action.
2. Discuss Gandhi's line: "It is for us to do the work, but the results are always in God's hands." How good are you at letting go of attachment to outcomes?
3. Discuss the difference between having intentions versus being attached to specific outcomes. Which of these two approaches is ultimately more effective? Why?
4. What does the familiar phrase, "Don't let perfection be an enemy of the good" mean to you? Do you agree or disagree?
5. Share a story of a time when you had to take action before you had all of the information you needed. What did you learn from this experience?

● Going Deeper

For a more detailed study of chapter 3 of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*:

1. Discuss Buddha's three-part metaphor about irrigation, archery, and woodcarving. How is gaining wisdom similar to irrigating a field, shooting an arrow, or carving wood? (86-89)
2. Here in this chapter we once again grapple with the metaphysical position of non-dualism—the idea that all is one. Summarize the argument in paragraphs two and three on page 90. How does the idea of oneness impact the nature of our actions?
3. What is meant by the Hindu idea of *dharma*? What does it mean to you? (90)
4. As we wrestle with the idea of acting without attachments to the outcomes of our actions, why is it so important to differentiate between attachment and intention? (90-91)
5. Think back on actions you have taken. How have you navigated with space between attachment and intention? Which path was most successful? Why?

6. Discuss the section called “The Owl and the Fisherman.” Share a story of a time when your good deeds were marred by judging others and self-aggrandizement. (91-93)
7. What does the story in the section called “The Sniper and the Doctor” reveal about the complex, subtle, and nuanced idea of *dharma*? (94-96)
8. Discuss the quote from the Bhagavad Gita on page 96. Share a story of a time when you refrained from action because of the imperfections of the process. Can you think of any political or social justice actions impacted by this dynamic? (96)
9. Summarize the argument in the section called “Action vs. Inaction.” Why is action unavoidable? If that’s true, then what *do* we have control over? (97-98)
10. Explore the deeper meanings of non-violence (*ahimsa*, or no-harm). How is *ahimsa* different from rigid and unwavering pacifism? How do the stories of the Navajo and Algonquin hunters reflect this perspective? (98-102)
11. Describe a time when you did everything you could to minimize the harm of a certain course of action, but harm happened anyway. How did you navigate this challenge?
12. Summarize Gandhi’s approach to these problems in the section called “Means and Ends.” (102-105)
13. Summarize the Hindu concept of *karma*, highlighting some of the misunderstandings and challenges surrounding this complex idea. (105-107)
14. One of the more challenging questions that emerges from an examination of *karma* is its impact on free will. Are we bound by past actions? Or are we free in this moment to choose our next step? Or is there a middle path between these two positions? (107-108)
15. Draw a vertical line down the center of a piece of paper. On the left column write a list of all of the conditions in your life you did not choose. On the right column write a list of all of the ways you freely chose your current circumstances. Which of these two lists of factors played a larger role in the shaping of your life? (107-108)
16. What does Buddha’s parable of the arrow illustrate about the essential role of action? (108-110)
17. Summarize Camus’s analysis of the myth of Sisyphus. What does it mean to say that “It is only from our willful commitment and decisive action that meaning emerges?” How have you experienced this dynamic play out in your own life? (110-113)
18. In your own experience, how are thoughts a kind of action? (113-115)

19. Summarize the core concept in Malcolm Gladwell's essay "The 10,000 Hour Rule." How does the story of the Beatles' early years exemplify this process? Share a story of how this rule shaped an aspect of your own life. (115-116)
20. Summarize Confucius's teachings on *li* and Aristotle's teachings on *eudaimonia* as expressions of the power of action. Share a story of your own experiences with these dynamics. (116-118)
21. Invite the group to read aloud all thirteen statements in the section called "A Wise Person." Which of these qualities seems most important? (120-121)
22. Invite a volunteer to read aloud "The Closing Meditation" as the other group members close their eyes and deepen into the embodied awareness of engagement. (121-124)
23. Conversely, if you are alone, use the voice memo function of your phone to record yourself reading the closing meditation aloud, then listen to the recording with your eyes closed. (121-124)
24. What other lingering issues or challenges in this chapter require more investigation and examination?

The Fourth Stone

Chapter 4: Wisdom as Allowance

● Starting Out

General discussion questions to open things up:

1. Share a story of a time when you were trying very hard to accomplish something, but it was only when you *stopped* trying that you achieved your aim. How can this be explained?
2. Sometimes the religious or spiritual path is described as disciplined and arduous. What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “my yoke is easy and my burden light?” (Matt 11:28)
3. What does the idea of “faith” mean to you? Does it mean believing in things for which there is no evidence, or something else?
4. Share something about your prayer or meditation practice. What are the benefits of time spent in the stillness beneath the waves of intellectual analysis and focused action?

● Going Deeper

For a more detailed study of chapter 4 of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*:

1. In the section called “The Consciousness of Allowance,” how does the wisdom of allowance emerge from the previous three stages of acceptance, surrender, and engagement? (128-129)
2. How is allowance like the Daoist concept of *wu wei*? (129-132)
3. Summarize Kant’s discussion of the “good will.” How does this inherent potential for goodness resemble the Daoist idea of following the Dao? (135-137)
4. And how does all of that align with Jesus’ statement, “...my yoke is easy and my burden is light?” (137-138)
5. What are some of the meanings of faith discussed in the section called “Pure Grace?” Which definition of faith seems best to you? (138-141)
6. In some circles, the idea of faith has been used to coerce, shame, or threaten. If you have had bad experiences surrounding the concept of faith, share those experiences.

7. How does the quote from Thoreau's *Walden* exemplify the intersections of faith, grace, and allowance? (140)
8. If you have practiced meditation and prayer, share your thoughts about how they are both similar and different.
9. Discuss the various definitions of meditation and prayer expressed in the section called "The Power of Meditation and Prayer." (141-146)
10. How do the practices of meditation and prayer align with the consciousness of allowance? (141-146)
11. Discuss the section called "Being Who We Are." What are some of the many ways the consciousness of allowance is championed throughout the world's wisdom traditions? (146-150)
12. How does the consciousness of allowance facilitate the emergence of our uncluttered authenticity? And how does our authenticity empower us? (146-150)
13. The phrase "dying to self" originated in the St. Francis Prayer. What is its deeper meaning? (150-151)
14. What are the key differences between humility and humiliation? (150-151)
15. How is surfing an apt metaphor for the consciousness of allowance? (151-155)
16. After reading the section called "Good Will, Happiness, and Self-Esteem," discuss how the cultivation of our inherent good will aligns with the consciousness of allowance. (155-158)
17. What, according to Judith Boss, is the real source of self-esteem? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? (156-158)
18. Read the section called "Allowance Feels Good." As we begin to deepen into and understand the surprising power of the consciousness of allowance, do the claims made in this section align with your own experience? Why or why not? What further questions arise from these considerations? (158-160)
19. Invite group members to read aloud all twenty statements in the section called "A Wise Person." Which of these qualities seems most important? (160-162)
20. Invite a volunteer to read aloud "The Closing Meditation" as the other group members close their eyes and deepen into the embodied awareness of allowance. (162-166)

21. Conversely, if you are alone, use the voice memo function of your phone to record yourself reading the closing meditation aloud, then listen to the recording with your eyes closed.
(162-166)
22. What other lingering issues or challenges in this chapter require more investigation and examination?

The Fifth Stone

Chapter 5: Wisdom as Enjoyment

● Starting Out

General discussion questions to open things up:

1. Is there a difference between pleasure and enjoyment? If so, explain.
2. Discuss the positive and negative impacts of pursuing pleasure and enjoyment. What then is the best way to manage our relationship with pleasure and enjoyment?
3. What is the relationship, if any, between our enjoyment of the world and our experience of the sacred?
4. In some religious circles, pleasure and enjoyment are intertwined with shame. Share a story of your journey through this thorny thicket.
5. Is it possible to deeply enjoy the world without a sense of ownership or attachment? What would that look like?

● Going Deeper

For a more detailed study of chapter 5 of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*:

1. What does Gandhi's statement "renounce and enjoy" mean to you? (169-170)
2. On pages 170-171 an effort is made to differentiate between "pleasure" and "enjoyment." What makes enjoyment a little different than pleasure? (170-171)
3. An ongoing theme of the book so far has been the interconnectedness and interdependence of the seven stones or steps. Keeping with that theme, how is enjoyment connected to the four stones that came before? (171)
4. Do you ever feel guilty or shameful when experiencing pleasure or enjoyment? As you reflect on this, what might be the deeper roots of this unfortunate dynamic? (172-173)
5. Compare and contrast the two conceptions of hedonism proffered by Aristippus and Epicurus. Which seems superior to you? (173)

6. How do Bentham and Mill use classical hedonism to build the ethical theory known as utilitarianism in the 19th century? (174-176)
7. What is the “principle of utility” or the “pleasure principle”? How do Bentham and Mill use this principle as a starting point for utilitarianism? (174-176)
8. Discuss Epicurus’s claim that obviously deleterious behaviors like drug addiction are more a cognitive error than moral weakness. Is he right? (176)
9. Why, in the Hindu or Vedanta framework, is pleasure (*kama*) a window into the sacred? (177-178)
10. What safeguards does Vedanta philosophy put in place to ensure that our experience of *kama* causes no harm? (178)
11. Summarize the Buddhist concept of the middle path. How might walking the middle path enhance the enjoyment our own lives? (179-180)
12. Read aloud and discuss this passage at the bottom of page 180: “Enjoyment is simply a natural byproduct of a well-lived life, a life of conscious intentionality, generosity, love, community, creativity, and abundance. Our ability to take pleasure in life is a measure of our wellness.” Do you agree or disagree? Why? (180)
13. In the section called “Making Peace with the Material World” we once again take up the idea of shame, and how it is sometimes taught in certain religious circles. If this resonates with you, share a story about your challenges with this issue. (181-182)
14. What does being “at play in the field of forms” mean to you? (182-184)
15. Discuss the following passage: “This is what it means to be at play in the field of forms—reaching without grasping, creating without craving, holding without clinging, caring without attachment, bonding without binding, and stewardship with ownership.” Do you agree or disagree? What questions arise in you as you reflect on this? (183-184)
16. Why was the play we engaged in as children (and even now) an essential educational exercise, specifically around the idea of wearing masks and role playing? (184-186)
17. How does the Hindu concept of *Ananda* deepen our understanding and appreciation of the experience of enjoyment? (186-188)
18. Is bliss part of our essential nature? (186-188)
19. What did Joseph Campbell really mean when he said, “Follow your bliss?” (187-188)

20. What changes would begin to take shape in your life if you were to lean a little bit into the idea of following your bliss?
21. Summarize Aristotle's idea of *eudaimonia*. What is it and how do we realize it? What roles do reason, education, habituation, and character play in its manifestation? (188-193)
22. Why was courage such an important virtue for the ancient Greeks? (192-193)
23. Read the section called "The Philosophy of Friendship" and reflect on your own experiences with friendship. Does this passage resonate with your own understanding of friendship? What would you add or amend? (194-196)
24. Toward the end of the section called "Wild Strawberries," there is a summation of the wisdom of enjoyment: "Enjoyment was never about ownership. It is rightfully a nameless experience of the symmetry between our being and the being of the cosmos, a oneness that transcends the concepts and objects of the world of forms. Beauty and joy take us back to our original nature as spiritual beings at play in the field of forms." How would you respond to this passage? (198-199)
25. Invite group members to read aloud all fourteen statements in the section called "A Wise Person." Which of these qualities seems most important? (199-203)
26. Invite a volunteer to read aloud "The Closing Meditation" as the other group members close their eyes and deepen into the embodied awareness of enjoyment. (203-207)
27. Conversely, if you are alone, use the voice memo function of your phone to record yourself reading the closing meditation aloud, then listen to the recording with your eyes closed. (203-207)
28. What other lingering issues or challenges in this chapter require more investigation and examination?

The Sixth Stone

Chapter 6: Wisdom as Love

● Starting Out

General discussion questions to open things up:

1. What are the different ways you've experienced love in your life? Are they all aspects of one underlying reality, or are they distinctly different things?
2. Is love a purely spontaneous, unconscious thing, or can it be facilitated by deliberate actions and rituals? Explain.
3. For some people, devotional worship is an essential element of their spiritual lives. For others, not so much. Where are you on this spectrum? Why?
4. In many religious and mythological systems, the creator deity loves and desires a relationship with his/her/their creation. What does this metaphorical dynamic suggest about the nature of reality?

● Going Deeper

For a more detailed study of chapter 6 of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*:

1. Briefly define the four main types of love found in the Greek language: *eros*, *storge*, *philia*, and *agape*. How are they different? (210-219)
2. As you reflect on your own experiences with love, how have these four forms of love interwoven in your life?
3. Jesus spoke Aramaic, but the gospel writers wrote in Greek, so when Jesus speaks about love it's rendered as *agape*. How does this shape our understanding of Christian love? (216-219)
4. Discuss the Longfellow quote on page 217: "If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility." What does this claim suggest about the nature and root causes of conflict?
5. Define the Confucian concept of *li* and discuss its central role in the maintenance of our relationships. (219-222)

6. Why, for Confucius, is human action so important? (220-221)
7. Compare and contrast the Confucian concept of *li* with Aristotle's claims regarding the importance of habituation and *eudaimonia* in chapter 5.
8. How do the two sections called "The Shoebox Under the Bed" and "One Cup of Tea" shore up the importance of action, behavior, and ritual in the construction and maintenance of authentic love? (222-226)
9. Share a story from your own life when the observance of ritual or ritualized actions created space for love and connection to flourish. Are Confucius and Aristotle right?
10. In the informality of our contemporary culture many rituals have vanished. What have we lost as a result? How might we restore some of these connective rituals?
11. In the section called "Lost in Translation" we return to a discussion of *agape* as it appears in the gospels of the New Testament. Compare and contrast the Greek term *agape* with the Aramaic term *hooba*. How might a synthesis of these two ideas deepen our insight into devotional religion? (226-228)
12. Briefly define the four yogas of Hinduism: *jnana*, *karma*, *raja*, and *bhakti yoga*. Which of the four would be the best fit for you? (228-233)
13. Why is the devotional path of *bhakti yoga* inherently dualistic? (230-231)
14. Discuss the Buddhist concepts of attachment and non-attachment. Why is attachment so destructive to our capacity to truly love? (233-235)
15. How do the Buddhist concepts of *shunyata* and *Dharmakaya* deepen our understanding of non-attachment? (234)
16. How does the creation parable in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* illustrate the interdependence of divine love and the myriad forms of this world? (235-237)
17. How does the creation parable in the Mayan *Popul Vuh* bring into sharper focus the way love binds the universe together? (237-239)
18. The section called "Love at the End" is a euthanasia story. As we reflect on the nature of love, and on the notion of non-attachment, why is it sometimes the most loving thing to do to let go? What, finally, does death teach us about love? (239-244)
19. Invite group members to read aloud all ten statements in the section called "A Wise Person." Which of these qualities seems most important? (245-247)

20. Invite a volunteer to read aloud “The Closing Meditation” as the other group members close their eyes and deepen into an embodied awareness of love. (247-252)
21. Conversely, if you are alone, use the voice memo function of your phone to record yourself reading the closing meditation aloud, then listen to the recording with your eyes closed. (247-252)
22. Read aloud and discuss the Hafiz poem called “I Have Learned So Much” on page 253. What has the protagonist in the poem come to understand about the nature of religion?
23. What other lingering issues or challenges in this chapter require more investigation and examination?

The Seventh Stone

Chapter 7: Wisdom as Integration

● Starting Out

General discussion questions to open things up:

1. Are there conflicting or contrasting qualities in your own personality? How do you reconcile them or live peacefully with the contradiction?
2. Sometimes two opposite statements can both be true at the same time. Can you think of any examples? How might we navigate this problem?
3. What does the existence of paradox suggest about the nature of language itself?
4. Bertrand Russell wrote that “the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt.” Do you see this dynamic in play in our public discourse? What is it about the nature of deeper discernment that makes it less susceptible to dogmatic certainty?
5. Discuss Meister Eckhart’s claim that “God is not attained by a process of addition...but by a process of subtraction.” What are some of the things we might subtract from our life in order to experience ultimate reality more directly?

● Going Deeper

For a more detailed study of chapter 7 of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*:

1. Discuss the Walt Whitman quote that opens up this chapter: “Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes.” What does this passage from his masterpiece “Song of Myself” mean to you? (255)
2. Discuss the line from the *Dao De Jing* that closes the first paragraph: “The more you know, the less you understand.” What does this passage mean to you? (255)
3. Break down and interpret the prism metaphor on page 256. How is the human mind like a prism? (256)
4. Truth often arrives in pairs of contradictory statements—a paradox. Can you think of two contradictory statements that are both true? (256-263)

5. What do you think Ralph Waldo Emerson meant when he wrote, “To be great is to be misunderstood?” (261)
6. Thinking back to our earlier discuss of the Buddhist concept of non-attachment, how might practicing non-attachment help us wrestle with truth and paradox?
7. What does the existence of paradox reveal about the imprecise and provisional nature of language itself? (262-263)
8. Summarize the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna’s distinction between ordinary knowledge and transcendent knowledge or *prajna*. How might this distinction help us navigate the paradoxical nature of truth? (263-263)
9. In his masterpiece *The Republic*, Greek philosopher Plato argues that there are four levels of knowledge, the highest being *noesis*. How is *noesis* like *prajna*? (265-266)
10. In the section called “The Cloud of Unknowing,” why are meditation and contemplation such core practices throughout the world’s wisdom traditions? (267-268)
11. Discuss the following sentence: “If you want to know God, you have to forget everything you know about God?” Why? (267)
12. The German philosopher Hegel gave us a powerfully illustrative image of the dialectical nature of truth—the bud/blossom/fruit metaphor—thereby resolving the “problem” of paradox. Contradictory truth statements, it turns out, don’t really conflict or cancel each other out—they work together to move us closer to a truth not yet revealed. Can you think of an example of the dialectical nature of truth in your own experience, or in the history of the evolution of thought? (268-270)
13. It turns out that the tension between contradictory truth-statements, (what Hegel calls “negation”) isn’t a bad thing—in fact, it’s a necessary and productive energy that contributes to human knowledge at both the individual and societal level. How might our appreciation of the generative power of negation help us make peace with paradox and contradiction? (271-273)
14. Discuss Bertrand Russell’s observation that “the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt.” Can you think of any examples? How might this destructive dynamic be healed by a deeper understanding of the dialectical nature of truth? (273)
15. How did Buddha use the image of a raft to illustrate the proper use of concepts, teachings, and practices? (273-274)

16. How does the phenomenon of fundamentalism, in all its forms, violate the principles Buddha was trying to convey with the raft image? (273-277)
17. Discuss the many ways the dangers of religious fundamentalism threaten the deeper meanings, truths, and values of the very religions from which they emerge? (273-277)
18. What does it mean to read myths metaphorically, as opposed to literally? In what way is naming ultimate reality “Father” a metaphor? (277-280)
19. What, according to Joseph Campbell, is the real power of myth? What can myths do for us that simple facts cannot? (277-280)
20. In what sense is mythology the penultimate step? What is the ultimate or final step? (279)
21. What then is the proper use of all myth and religion? (279-280)
22. What is the connection between loosening our grasp on our conceptual ideologies, and building real and meaningful peace? (280-283)
23. Discuss the Thich Nhat Hanh quote, “It is my conviction that there is no way to peace—peace is the way.” What do you think he meant? (282)
24. Discuss the idea that “Peace means falling out of love with our own ideas.” What does this mean to you? (282)
25. When religion is understood as a field of metaphors, rituals, symbols, and practices that point beyond the conceptual realm to the ineffable mystery beyond all thought, it can be a profoundly helpful and healing experience. Discuss the role of religion as a positive force in your life. (283-285)
26. Summarize Carl Jung’s assessment of the value of religious experience in the healing of mental illness. (283-284)
27. In the section called “The Method of No-Method,” summarize the three stages of awareness in Zhuangzi’s story “Cutting Up an Ox.” How have you experienced these three stages in any of your learning processes? (286-288)
28. What did Carl Jung mean by “individuation,” and how is it connected to personal integration? (288-289)
29. How does Debbie Ford’s shadow work exercise, described on pages 289-291, illustrate the meaning of personal integration? Even though the surprise ending is already revealed, perform this same exercise with yourself and see what you discover. (289-291)

30. In our consideration of this final stone—integration—it has become increasingly clear that wisdom lies beyond all of our conceptual understanding. Wisdom can be experienced, but not conceptualized; embodied, but not understood. In the section called “Truth is a Pathless Land,” even the central image of the book—a path that leads to wisdom—begins to shimmer like a mirage. How are these claims challenging to our understanding of spiritual growth as a path? (294-296)
31. Discuss your interpretation of Meister Eckhart’s claim that “God is not attained by a process of addition of anything to the soul, but by a process of subtraction.” What are some of the things we should subtract from our life in order to experience ultimate reality more directly? (295)
32. In the middle of page 296 it says that “Living in the question is preferable to dwelling on an answer.” What does that mean to you? (296)
33. In chapter 13 of the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus reveals an important truth about the nature of teachers and teachings. Discuss that scriptural passage, and explore your understanding of the proper role and purpose of teachers and teachings. (296-299)
34. The wisdom of integration seeks to unify all of the polarities, or at least embrace their complementary nature. Read page 301 aloud and discuss the many possibilities these suggestions raise. (301)
35. In the Buddhist parable of the Poisonous Tree, what does the tree represent, and what are the three possible ways of seeing and understanding the tree. Discuss the parable’s application in our real lives. (302-303)
36. What did Thomas Merton mean by “final integration?” How might it benefit us to cultivate this same stance? (304-306)
37. Invite group members to read aloud all sixteen statements in the section called “A Wise Person.” Which of these qualities seems most important? (306-309)
38. Invite a volunteer to read aloud “The Closing Meditation” as the other group members close their eyes and deepen into an embodied awareness of integration, and of the entire seven stone path. (309-313)
39. Conversely, if you are alone, use the voice memo function of your phone to record yourself reading the closing meditation aloud, then listen to the recording with your eyes closed. (309-313)

40. What other lingering issues or challenges in this chapter require more investigation and examination?
41. Looking back over our entire study of *The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom*, which ideas, questions, suggestions, or practices rise to the surface for you? What further questions would you like to explore?
42. Type up the concise summation of The Seven Stone Path on pages 319-321, print it out, and tape it to your refrigerator for further reflection.

The Seven Stone Path: An Everyday Journey to Wisdom can be found online wherever fine books are sold, including:

- Amazon
- Barnes & Noble
- Target
- Walmart
- Balboa Press
- Thrift Books
- and more

For free downloads of this workbook, and a calendar of all upcoming events, please visit www.peterbolland.com.

I'm grateful to everyone who's walked alongside me on this path. Your curiosity and presence inspires me more than you will ever know.

Gratefully,

Peter Bolland

