

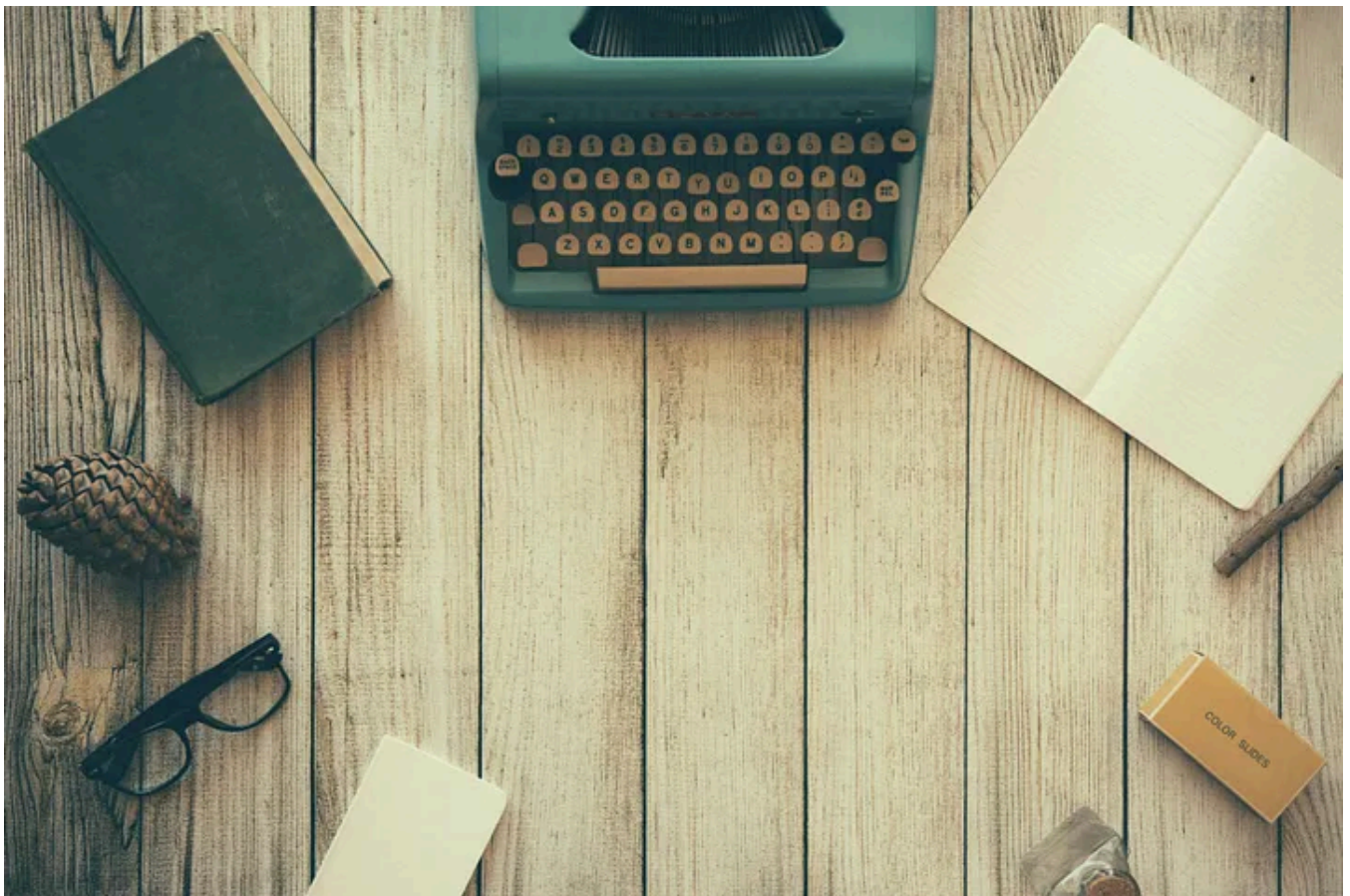
[Open in app](#)**Medium** SearchYour subscription payment failed. [Update payment method](#)

Buddhism Makes Better Writers

6 min read · Just now



Pema Düddul

 Listen Share MorePhoto by [RetroSupply](#) on [Unsplash](#)

For the last 18 years, I have taught creative writing, editing and publishing in Australian universities. In that time, I was promoted to the second-highest academic rank of Associate Professor, equivalent to a senior professor in the USA. I have a PhD in Written Communication and a Master of Arts in Creative Writing. I am also a

Dharma teacher with more than 40 years of immersion in Buddhist practice. What follows is the condensed essence of what I've learned over the last decades about the practice of writing and Buddhism.

What makes a writer better? Technique, of course. Reading widely, certainly. But there's another, quieter path to becoming a better writer — one not often mentioned in writing workshops or MFA programs. It's the practice of Buddhism. Far from being a niche spiritual endeavour, Buddhism offers practices that can enrich not only our lives but also our creative output. Buddhism is not really a religion. It is a science of the mind that can be approached in a completely secular way, with simple, accessible practices that lead to greater sanity, peace, calm, and, last but by no means least, creativity.

Four core Buddhist practices — relaxation, calm abiding meditation, mindfulness, and solitude — have the potential to transform both the wellbeing and the writing of those who take them seriously. These practices don't simply lead to greater peace of mind. They prepare the ground for clearer seeing, deeper listening, and more authentic expression. They help us get out of our own way. They teach us to notice the moment as it is, which is the beginning of all good writing.

The Art of Letting Go: Relaxation and the Creative Flow

In Buddhist psychology, relaxation (or *passaddhi*) is one of the Seven Factors of Awakening. These are the essential requirements for enlightenment. Passaddhi, or deep relaxation, refers to a profound settling of body and mind, a release of inner tension that allows insight to arise. This isn't the relaxation of a spa day or a nap, but a profound letting go of habitual grasping, judgment, and effort.

Writers often find themselves trapped in what psychologists call "task tension", which is the anxious energy that arises when trying to force creativity. We sit down to write and immediately feel we have to produce something great, or at least something good. But this pressure chokes the creative process. It narrows our attention and cuts us off from the more spacious, intuitive mind that is the true source of inspiration.

Buddhist relaxation softens this tension. It invites us to dwell in openness, to ease the inner critic, to give the imagination room to breathe. Relaxation doesn't dull the mind. It sensitizes it. When a writer is relaxed in the Buddhist sense, language begins to flow freely rather than having to be dragged out of us. Characters speak

more clearly. Images arise unbidden. Sentences shape themselves with surprising grace. The page becomes a field, not a battlefield.



Photo by [Aaron Burden](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Calm Abiding: Stillness as a Creative Engine

Shamatha, or calm abiding meditation, is a foundational Buddhist practice that trains the mind to rest in a state of aware serenity. Often misunderstood as a means of escaping thought, it is better understood as a method for cultivating clarity, attention, and inner spaciousness.

In the creative context, shamatha is a radical act. We live in an age of distraction — an economy of interruption — where attention is fragmented and commodified. Writers are not immune. The internet beckons. Notifications ping. Even without external triggers, the mind leaps from idea to idea, abandoning the creative thread just as it begins.

Calm abiding reverses this. It teaches us to return again and again to a single point of focus — usually the breath — with gentleness and perseverance. Over time, this

practice stabilizes the attention and quiets the noise. And in that quiet, something marvellous happens: we hear ourselves as we really are. Not the usual anxious din of constant verbal overthinking, but a silent and still inner awareness.

Many great writers, knowingly or not, practice a form of shamatha when they sit at the desk each day with no agenda except to remain present. They wait. They watch. And eventually, something surfaces. With a calm mind, a writer can follow an idea through its unfolding, stay with a character as they evolve, or allow a theme to reveal itself without force. Stillness, it turns out, is a creative engine.



Photo by [Tim Goedhart](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Mindfulness: Writing What Is

Mindfulness (*sati* in Pali) is the simple but profound act of paying attention to the present moment with openness and without judgment. Applied to daily life, it brings clarity and emotional intelligence. Applied to writing, it brings precision and truth.

Mindful writers notice more. They observe how people speak, how light falls through a window, how emotions shift and unfold. They write what *is*, not what they think *should be*. This honesty is the heartbeat of good writing. More importantly,

mindfulness allows writers to become intimate with their own inner world. Emotions, beliefs, doubts, and dreams are not ignored or suppressed but noticed, explored, and expressed. This self-awareness deepens the emotional truth of a story, poem, or essay. Readers can sense when a writer is being honest and authentic, and it's mindfulness that makes such honesty and authenticity possible.

Mindfulness also helps navigate the storms of the writing process itself: frustration, insecurity, and perfectionism. A mindful writer doesn't have to believe every negative, self-critical thought that arises. They can notice self-doubt without being paralysed by it. They can stay with the discomfort of not knowing what comes next. And they can meet each word, each sentence, as it arrives, without judgment, without rush.



Photo by [Tim Goedhart](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The Fertile Ground of Solitude

Buddhism has long held solitude in high regard, not as an escape from the world but as a way of coming closer to what is real. Solitude is the container in which the other practices unfold. It offers space for reflection, contemplation, and integration. It is also a way of connecting with our innate joyfulness.

For writers, solitude is more than a lifestyle choice. It is a necessity. Yet in our hyper-connected world, solitude is rare and often feared. We fill our time with social media, podcasts, streaming media, and chatter, afraid of what might rise in the quiet. But creativity thrives in that quiet. In solitude, the imagination is unbound. There is room to hear the whisper of truth beneath all the fabricated noise. Solitude allows us to go inward, to listen deeply, to access the well of lived experience that is the raw material of writing. It helps us step outside of the narratives imposed by others — family, society, even literary culture — and write from our own truth.

In Buddhist-inspired solitude, there is no loneliness, nor glorified isolation. It is not about being alone against the world, but about learning to be present with ourselves. The writer who practices solitude begins to recognize that writing is not something they do. It is something they *receive* when they are quiet enough, open enough, still enough.



Image by Arun Anoop

Writing as Path, Not Product

When these four Buddhist practices — relaxation, calm abiding, mindfulness, and solitude — are integrated into a writer's life, writing becomes more than a craft. It becomes a path of awakening. On this path, success is measured not by publication or praise, but by depth of insight, authenticity of voice, and the capacity to be fully present with what is. The writer begins to see that their work is not separate from

their life. To write well is to live well. To live well is to write from the truth of who we are.

Buddhism does not promise commercial success or literary fame. What it offers is something rarer: the ability to write with clarity, compassion, and courage. It helps writers drop the mask, quiet the noise, and speak from the still core of their being. In the end, a better writer is not just someone who uses better words, but someone who listens more deeply, sees more clearly, and expresses more truthfully. Buddhism, in its quiet and powerful way, teaches us how to do all of these things.

Lama Pema runs retreats focused on integrating Buddhist practice with creative writing. For more information, go [HERE](#).

Like Lama Pema's writing? Read more here: <https://pemaduddul.org/>

[Creative Writing](#)[Buddhism](#)[Mindfulness](#)[Edit profile](#)

Written by Pema Düddul

15 followers · 5 following

Dr. Pema Düddul is a Buddhist chaplain, author, and an Associate Professor at the University of New England (Australia). He is also a transpersonal counsellor.

No responses yet



Pema Düddul

What are your thoughts?

More from Pema Düddul



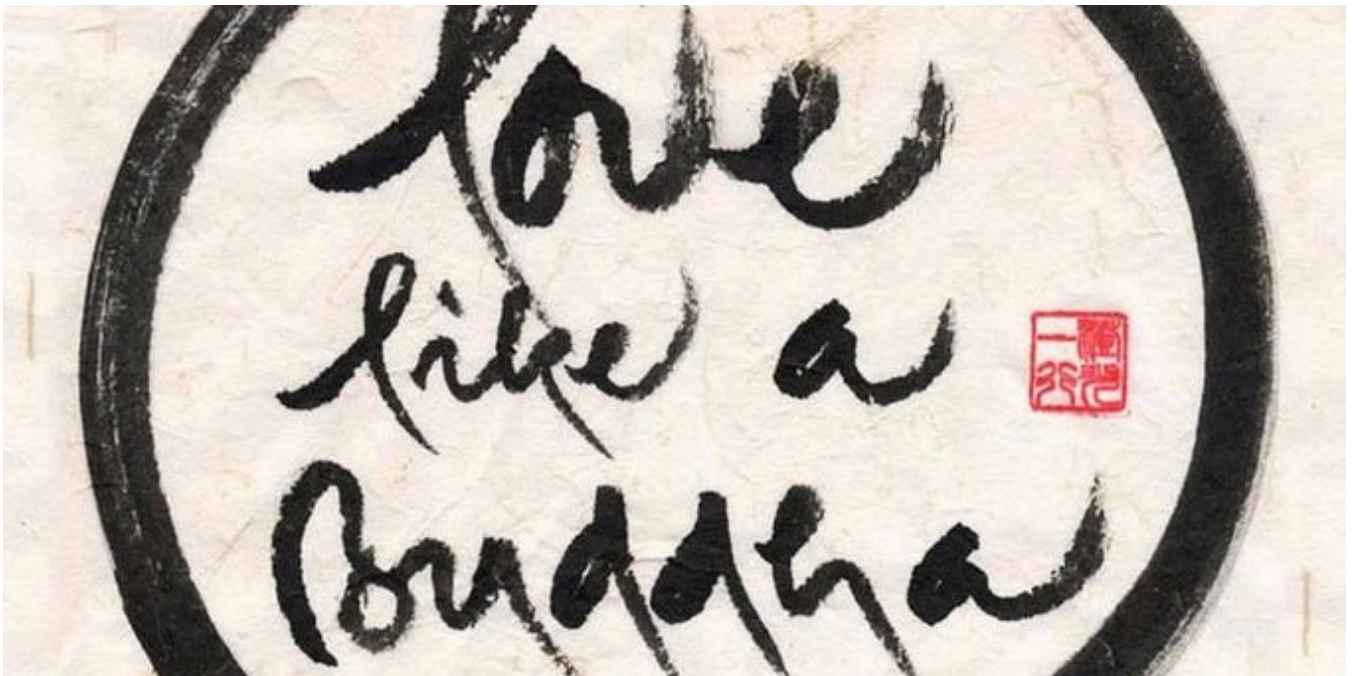
 Pema Düddul

The Spectrum of Vow-Holding in Buddhism: From Layperson to Dzogchen Yogin

In Buddhism, ethical discipline and the cultivation of virtue often take the form of vows—voluntary commitments that support one's...

Mar 25  2





 Pema Düddul

Dzogchen and Devotion

All sentient beings have one thing in common. It is not the only thing they have in common, but it is perhaps the most important. We all...

Feb 2  1  1



 Pema Düddul

We Need an Ethical Revolution in Response to a World in Crisis

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, instigated a social and spiritual revolution some 2600 years or so ago. That revolution changed the world...

Mar 16



Pema Düddul

The Most Profound Dzogchen Pith Instruction

Sometimes, I am asked, 'What is the most profound Dzogchen pith instruction'? My answer is always this instruction from Padmasambhava (Guru...

Nov 19, 2024

[See all from Pema Düddul](#)

Recommended from Medium



 In Psyc Digest by Alessia Fransisca 

The 1-Minute Introduction That Makes People Remember You Forever

A Behavioral Scientist's Trick to Hack the “Halo Effect”

Apr 12  26K  615



 In The Medium Blog by The Medium Newsletter

Maybe healing isn't about correcting your thoughts, but learning to live with them

The only reliable way to spot AI + an editing tip (Issue #330)

4d ago 🖱 924 💬 26



In LIFE REBOOT at 60 by Foteini Ntelopoulou

The Hidden Truth About Being Over 60 That No One Talks About

It's not the wrinkles, not the retirement, not the discounts—it's what happens in your head when no one's watching



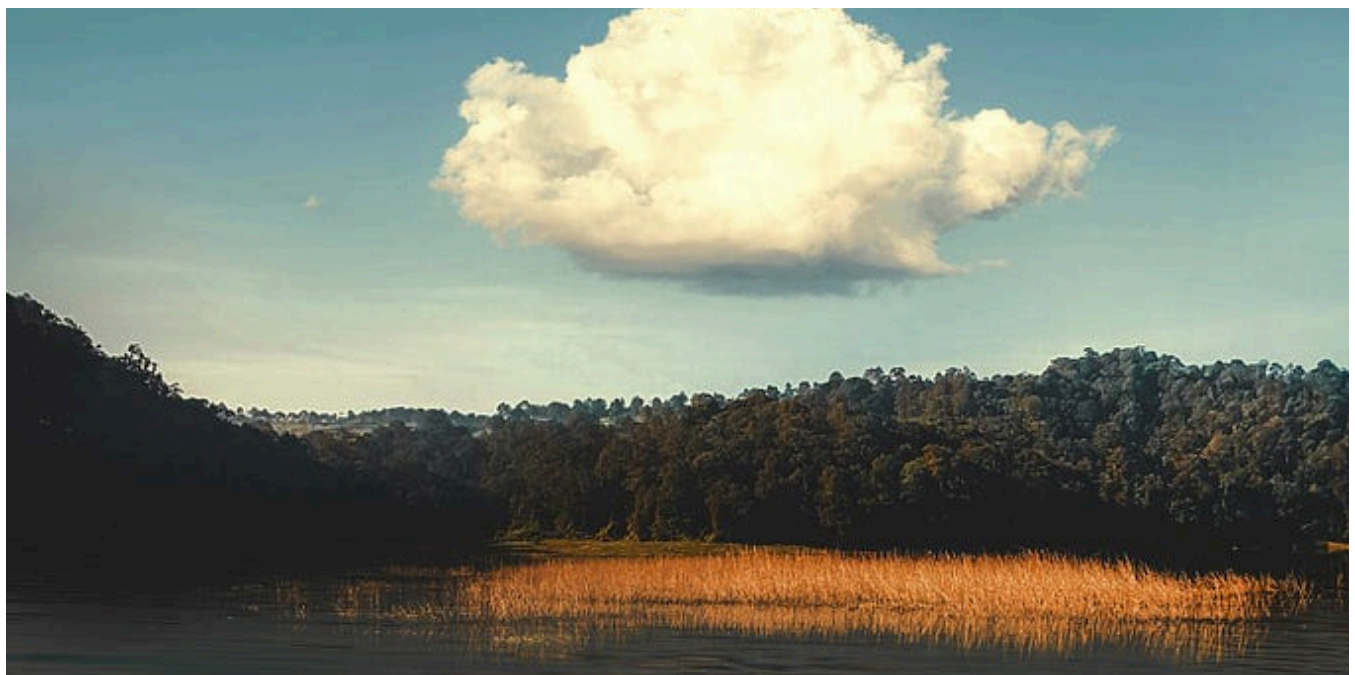
May 2



7.7K



193



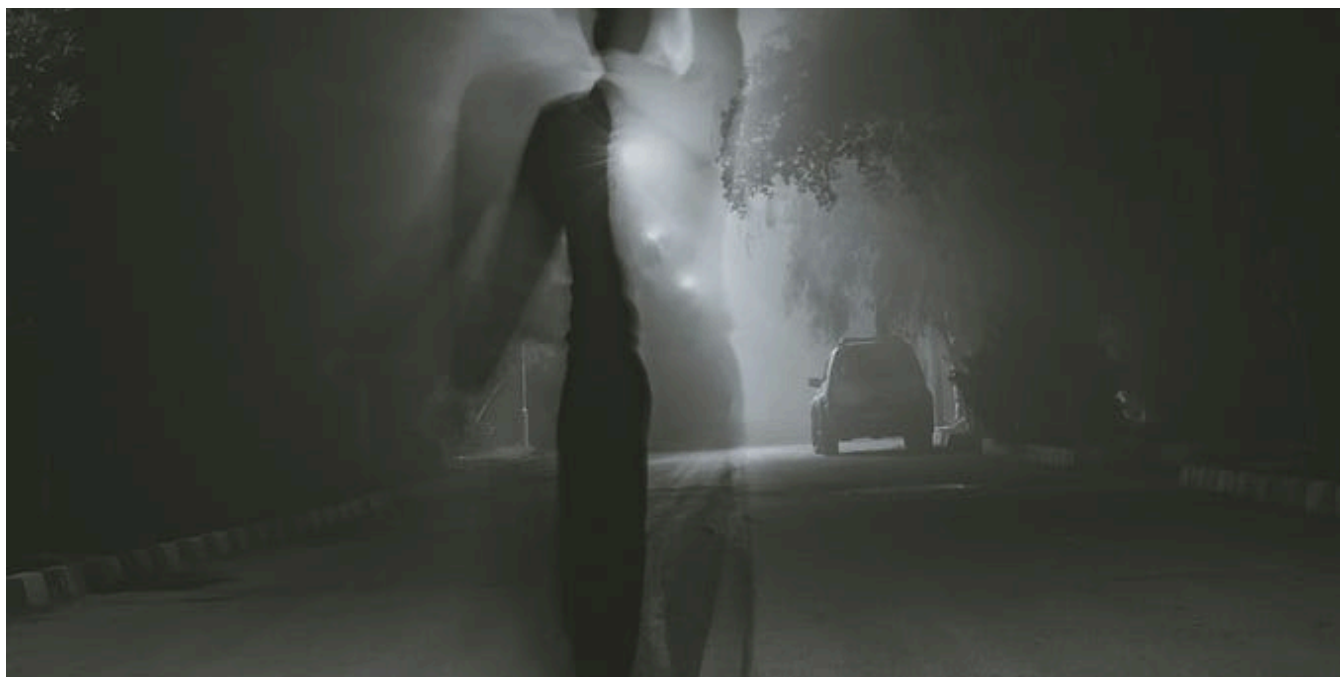
In Personal Growth by Thomas Oppong



The One Short Quote That Will Unsettle You, Then Transform You

It starts with discomfort. And ends with clarity.

★ May 10 🖱 1.2K 💬 13



 In Long After the Thrill by Shaant

I Didn't Know These Common Habits Were Signs of Mental Health Issues

These everyday habits felt harmless , until I learned they were quiet signs my mind was asking for help.

★ Apr 25 🖱 10.1K 💬 269





Jorden House-Hay

The Tallest Tree in The Forest

On Virtuous Growth and Its Enemies

May 10



439



17



See more recommendations