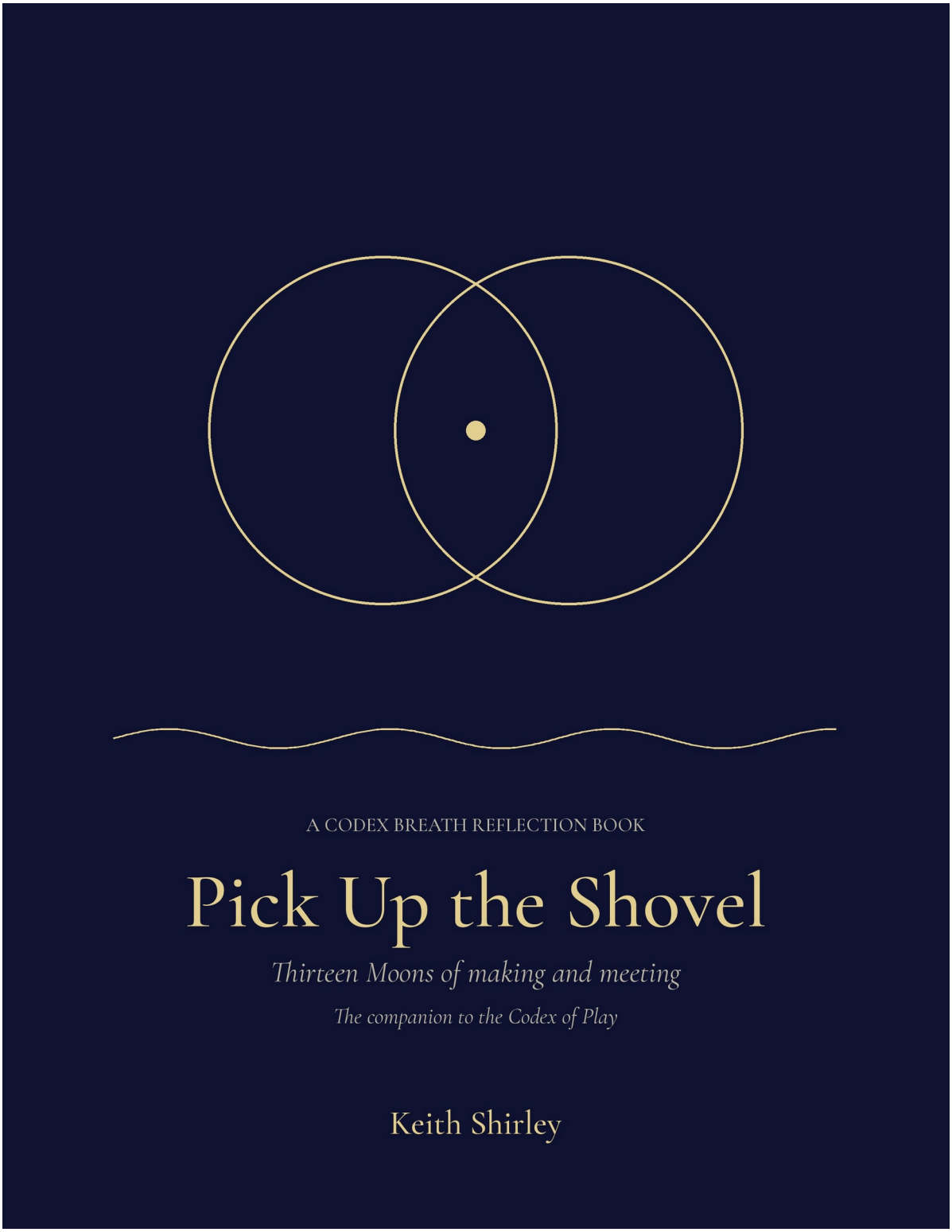

A CODEX BREATH REFLECTION BOOK
Pick Up the Shovel
Thirteen Moons of making and meeting
The companion to the Codex of Play
Keith Shirley

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In Harmony, Small Things Grow Towards Unity

Pick Up the Shovel: Thirteen Moons of Making and Meeting. A Codex Breath Reflection Book, companion to the Codex of Play. © 2026 Keith Shirley. First edition, November 2026.

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This book is a companion for reflection. It is not medical or psychological advice. Ask before you play, and let anyone stop. Breathe gently, and never force or hold the breath.

codexofplay.com · codexcalendar.com · breathawakens.com · codexlibrary.com

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The Pillar of Light Invocation

Your Love and Truth is universal.

Bring this universal love and truth to all.

You are in a sacred space for all to be heard and listened to.

Speak these words at the beginning and the end of each day's practice.

Before the First Game

> *On the seashore of endless worlds children meet.*
>
> *Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali, 60, 1912*

In *The Child, The Shovel and The Ocean* a child is building at the edge of the sea. Someone arrives. She does not explain anything. She picks up the shovel and asks what they are going to do.

That is the whole of this book. For one year, a day at a time, pick up the shovel.

You do not need a partner to begin. You do not need to be good at anything. You do not need to be happy. All humans can play. Everyone is welcome and everyone is invited, and all of it is free.

> *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*
>
> *Isaiah 55:1, King James Version*

How to Use This Book

What it is for

The Codex asks one question more often than any other: *what shall we make?* This book is a year of small answers.

It walks the thirteen spirals of collaboration, one to each Moon of the Codex Calendar. Each Moon has a living teacher: the cell that kept another alive, the fungus under the forest, the flower and the bee, the reef, the whales, the puppy at play. Each teacher shows one thing about how two can make a third, and each has a shadow, which is told. The guide to all of this is *What Shall We Make Today?* This book is the practice.

The shape of every Moon

Each Moon has four weeks. Each week carries one Pillar of Breath and one Pillar of Humanity from *Breath Awakens*, and one kind of practice.

Week	Pillar of Breath	Pillar of Humanity	What you practise	With whom
1 · days 1 to 7	Identify (Iphi). "I see this. I name this."	Sovereignty	Self-awareness	Yourself
2 · days 8 to 14	Accept (Shema). "I allow this to be true."	Adaptability	Situational awareness	The other, and the field
3 · days 15 to 21	Embrace (Vara). "I bring this into my field."	Beauty	Collaboration	One other
4 · days 22 to 28	Let Go (Ouon). "I no longer hold this as mine."	Coherence	Co-creation	Whoever comes

The first two weeks are done alone and they are not lesser. No one can make anything with another until they know where they are standing and can see who is in front of them.

The daily practice

1. Speak the Pillar of Light Invocation.
2. Take three easy breaths. Breathe gently, and never force or hold the breath.
3. Read the day's line once. Then do it. Most take a few minutes.
4. If you keep a notebook, write one sentence about what happened.

5. Close with one more breath, and the Invocation.

The seventh, fourteenth and twenty-first days are breath gates. They gather the week. The twenty-eighth is the Moon reflection. Lines marked ✦ are questions quoted from *Breath Awakens*.

You may begin on any day. Either start at today's Codex date, which codexcalendar.com will give you, or start at Moon I, Day 1, and let the book keep its own time.

The film and the talk

Every Moon names a film, and the eighth also names the parable; eight name a short talk. Watch the film in the first week and the talk in the second, alone or with someone. They are the twelve films and eight talks of the Codex path, with one more film that the author chose for the eighth Moon. Three are to be held with both hands, one is the second hand speaking, and the book says which.

The shovel picked up

Each Moon also offers one standing habit, kept for that Moon and carried on if it serves. By the thirteenth Moon there are thirteen. None is a rule.

If you are alone

Many people are, and this book is for them too. In the third and fourth weeks, every Moon gives a way to keep the practice with a stranger, an animal, a growing thing, or the place where you live. Play did not begin with people.

Five things kept always

Ask first. Play begins with an invitation, and an invitation can be declined. Never press anyone to play.

Everyone is free to stop, including you.

This book does not ask you to stay where you are being harmed. The tenth Moon is about taking. If someone is hurting you, the practice is not to play on. Tell someone you trust, or call your local crisis line (988 in the United States), and get safe.

Play with children only where you are known and welcome, and with their family's blessing.

It is not therapy or medical advice. If a line brings up more than you want to carry today, close the book and go outside. If it stays heavy, speak to someone you trust or to a professional.

On the old voices

Each Moon opens with a line from an old text or a writer long dead, in an old public translation. Where a tradition is living, its own people are its best interpreters. These lines are doorways, not the last word.

Year 1, for those beginning now

Moon	Begins	Moon	Begins
I · Genesis	20 March 2026	VIII · Release	2 October 2026
II · Spiral	17 April 2026	IX · Echo	30 October 2026
III · Vector	15 May 2026	X · Shadow	27 November 2026
IV · Mirror	12 June 2026	XI · Descent	25 December 2026
V · Stillness	10 July 2026	XII · Dream	22 January 2027
VI · Memory	7 August 2026	XIII · Wisdom	19 February 2027
VII · Return	4 September 2026	Breath Day	19 March 2027

For every later year, codexcalendar.com gives the living date.

Moon I · Genesis

The Merged Cell · the refusal to consume

> *His friend is another self.*
>
> *Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, IX.4, translated by W. D. Ross, 1908*

The teacher. About two billion years ago one cell took another inside itself and did not digest it. The one that was kept became the powerhouse of nearly every cell in your body. Every complex living thing descends from that one refusal to consume. It was not gentle, and the two could never again live apart. It is the oldest and costliest making-together there is.

Watch. *The Power of Myth* (1988). **Listen.** Carol Dweck, "The Power of Believing That You Can Improve".

The shovel picked up. Before you begin anything with anyone, ask. One sentence is enough: *shall we?*

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ Where do I begin and where do I end?

1. Stand still. Feel where your feet are. That is where you begin.
2. Name one thing you want today. Say it aloud to no one.
3. Name one thing you are afraid of today. It may stay.
4. What did you bring into the first room you entered this morning?
5. Finish this sentence three times: *I am someone who…*
6. Write the words "not yet" beside one thing you have called a failure.
7. Breath gate. What do I know about where I stand that I did not know a week ago?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ What part of my being resists change?

8. In the first room you enter, notice who is there before you speak.
9. Find someone doing a task you depend on and have never done.
10. Notice one person you usually compete with. What do they carry that you lack?
11. Watch two people greet each other. What passes between them?

12. Who near you is small, or new, or easily overlooked?
13. Find something that is two things joined: a graft on a tree, a hinge, a seam.
14. Breath gate. Whom did I see this week that I had been looking past?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ What about you most feels like home?

If you are alone: do these with a stranger for one sentence, or with an animal, or with the ground.

15. Ask someone: what are you working on? Then only listen.
16. Carry one end of something.
17. Tell one person a thing you admire in how they work.
18. Ask for help with something you could have done alone.
19. Offer one thing you have that another lacks. Let them refuse.
20. Begin one small thing with someone you would usually compete with.
21. Breath gate. What did I not consume this week that I could have?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ What essence am I embodying right now?

If you are alone: plant something, mend something, or leave something useful where another will find it.

22. With one other person, decide on something small to make this week.
23. Do the first part of it. Let them do theirs their way.
24. Notice the moment you want to take it over. Do not.
25. Finish it together, however rough.
26. Give it away, or leave it where it is needed.
27. Thank the other person for one particular thing.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I began. What have I been trying to digest that I could keep alive beside me?

Moon II · Spiral

The Underground Commons · reach before you take

> *No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.*
>
> *John Donne, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation XVII, 1624*

The teacher. Under the forest floor, fungi thread through the soil and join with the roots of most plants. The fungus brings water and minerals from far beyond the root. The plant pays in sugar. It is one of the oldest trades on land. The popular story that trees talk and care for their young through this web goes beyond the evidence, and some plants simply steal from it. The trade itself is real, and so is the reaching.

Watch. *Fantastic Fungi* (2019), with both hands. **Listen.** Robert Waldinger, "What Makes a Good Life?"

The shovel picked up. Each day, thank one unseen hand: someone whose work reached you today without your asking.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ What belief am I holding that is not mine?

1. List five people you could call tonight. That is your inner ring.
2. List what you reach for when you are tired. Name what each gives you.
3. What do you offer in return for what you take? Name one true thing.
4. Whose work reached you before breakfast? Count the hands.
5. Draw yourself as a dot. Draw a line to everyone you spoke with this week.
6. Which of those lines carries something both ways?
7. Breath gate. Where am I a root, and where am I a thread?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ How do my thoughts, feelings, sensations and emotions change when the field shifts?

8. Trace one thing you ate today back as far as you can.
9. In a shop, a street or a meeting, find the person everyone else depends on.

10. Notice who is at the edge of a group. What are they connected to that the centre is not?
11. Find a place where roots have lifted a path. Something is reaching under you.
12. Who in your circle connects people who would otherwise never meet?
13. Notice one exchange today in which nothing was counted.
14. Breath gate. What network am I standing in that I had not seen?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ How does my existence express harmony?

If you are alone: write to an author, a maker or a public servant whose work has fed you.

15. Write to one person at the edge of your circle, with nothing to ask.
16. Introduce two people who should know each other.
17. Take something useful to a neighbour.
18. Ask an older person how something used to be done.
19. Pass on a piece of good news that is not about you.
20. Share a meal, however small.
21. Breath gate. What did I carry this week from one person to another?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ Can I hold my true nature without collapsing into another's?

If you are alone: put something into a common place: a shared shelf, a seed swap, a free box.

22. With others, begin something that belongs to no one: a shared list, a shelf, a patch of ground.
23. Add to it. Do not sign it.
24. Invite one more person to add.
25. Leave it alone for a day.
26. Come back. See what others have done with it.
27. Let it go on without you.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I reached. What am I threaded into, and what do I send along the thread?

Moon III · Vector

The Honest Signal · an invitation that delivers what it promises

> *Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?*
>
> *Confucius, Analects, 1.1, translated by James Legge, 1861*

The teacher. A flower cannot travel, and a bee cannot make its own food. Out of that double need came colour, scent and nectar, and a visitor who carries pollen from bloom to bloom. The signals that build trust are often the ones that cost something and cannot be faked. But bees also bite through the side of a flower and rob it, and many orchids promise a reward and give none. Beauty can invite honestly, and it can be used to take.

Watch. *Life in Color* (2021). **Listen.** Simon Sinek, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action".

The shovel picked up. Say what you want plainly, once, and let the answer be the answer.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ Can I exist without needing to be seen?

1. Finish the sentence: *What I am for is…*
2. What do you promise people without saying it? Dress, manner, title.
3. Which of those promises do you keep?
4. Name one thing you hint at that you could simply ask for.
5. What do you need that you cannot make for yourself?
6. Write an invitation to one person, in one honest sentence. Do not send it yet.
7. Breath gate. What signal have I been sending that is not true?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ Can I remain coherent while exploring the unknown?

8. Watch a flower for five minutes. See who comes.
9. Notice one advertisement today. What does it promise? What does it deliver?
10. Find one honest signal: a worn tool, a callus, a garden that is weeded.
11. Whose yes do you trust? Why?
12. Notice someone asking for something sideways. What are they asking for?

13. Find a sign, a notice or a doorway that truly welcomes.
14. Breath gate. Which invitations around me are honest?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ Can I see beauty in the existence of another, even when incomplete?

If you are alone: put out water for the birds or plant something that flowers. That is an invitation too.

15. Send the invitation you wrote on day 6.
16. Accept an invitation you would usually decline.
17. Say no to one thing, plainly and kindly.
18. Ask someone what they need. Believe the answer.
19. Tell someone exactly what you can offer, and no more.
20. Keep one small promise to the letter.
21. Breath gate. What happened when I asked plainly?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ What remains when everything and all of me converge?

If you are alone: make something that invites: a bench, a sign, a bowl of fruit on a step.

22. With one other, make something whose only purpose is to welcome.
23. Agree what it promises. Promise less than you can give.
24. Put it where it will be found.
25. Let whoever comes, come.
26. Give what was promised.
27. Notice what came that you did not expect.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I invited. What fruit is being made between me and another that feeds more than the two of us?

Moon IV · Mirror

The Interspecies Bridge · arrive without an agenda

> *But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.*
>
> *Job 12:7-8, King James Version*

The teacher. In parts of Africa a wild bird leads people to bees' nests and waits for its share of the wax. When a dog and its person hold each other's gaze, the bonding hormone can rise in both. A diver who returned to the same kelp forest every day was, in time, approached by an octopus. Meeting is possible across the widest difference. It is also the easiest place to mistake our own feeling for the other's, and the helpful honey bird is a parasite to other birds. No one is one thing.

Watch. *My Octopus Teacher* (2020). **Listen.** Ernesto Sirolli, "Want to Help Someone? Shut Up and Listen!"

The shovel picked up. Listen without fixing. When someone tells you something, receive it. Offer no advice unless asked.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ *Where do I begin and where do I end?*

1. Think of someone who irritates you. Name the exact thing.
2. Where does that same thing live in you?
3. Think of someone you admire. Name the exact thing.
4. Where does that live in you, unused?
5. What do you assume about people who are unlike you?
6. Sit before a mirror for three easy breaths. Say nothing to the one you see.
7. Breath gate. What have I been seeing in others that is mine?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ *What part of my being resists change?*

8. Watch an animal for ten minutes. Do not name what it feels. Say only what it does.

9. Watch a person the same way: what they do, not what you think it means.
10. Notice the moment you decide you know what someone needs. Wait.
11. Find someone whose way of living is far from yours. What do they know that you do not?
12. Notice who approaches you, and how slowly.
13. Return to the same place for the third day running. See what has changed.
14. Breath gate. What did I see only because I stopped explaining?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ What about you most feels like home?

If you are alone: this is the Moon of the animal and the stranger. Choose one, and return to it daily.

15. Spend ten minutes with a creature, on its terms.
16. Ask someone very unlike you to teach you one thing.
17. Sit with someone and ask nothing of them.
18. Let someone help you in their way, not yours.
19. Ask: what would be useful? Then do only that.
20. Go back to the same person or creature. Returning is the practice.
21. Breath gate. Who came toward me this week?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ What essence am I embodying right now?

If you are alone: make something for a creature: a feeder, a shelter, a clean bowl of water.

22. With someone unlike you, find one thing you both care about.
23. Let them say what it should be.
24. Add only what is asked for.
25. Make it at their pace.
26. Let it look like them, and not like you.
27. Notice what you learned that you could not have learned alone.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I arrived without an agenda. Where am I still showing up to be right, and what might come toward me if I simply came back and waited?

Moon V · Stillness

The Reef Weavers · host, and guard the limit

> *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*
>
> *Hebrews 13:2, King James Version*

The teacher. A coral is an animal with a tiny alga living in its body. The alga makes food from light. The animal builds stone. Together they raise reefs that shelter about a quarter of the sea's species. But the partnership has a threshold. When the water stays too warm, the alga is lost and the coral whitens. A host that does not guard its limits collapses, and takes its guests with it.

Watch. *Breaking Boundaries* (2021). **Listen.** Robin Dunbar, "Can the Internet Buy You More Friends?"

The shovel picked up. Name one limit aloud each week, to someone who needs to know it.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ What belief am I holding that is not mine?

1. How do you know when you are near your limit? Name the first sign in the body.
2. What do you host: people, work, worry? Make the list.
3. Which of those feeds you back?
4. Sit still for five minutes. Notice what you want to get up and do for someone.
5. What would you stop doing if no one would be disappointed?
6. Name your five. The ones you would cross a city for.
7. Breath gate. What is my threshold, and have I told anyone?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ How do my thoughts, feelings, sensations and emotions change when the field shifts?

8. Find a place that shelters many: a tree, a porch, a kitchen. Who keeps it?
9. Notice who in your circle is hosting more than they can bear.

10. Find a boundary that makes a place better: a hedge, a door, a closing time.
11. Whose home are you a guest in, this week? Count them.
12. Notice a house, a team or a table that is bleaching. What is too warm?
13. Find something built slowly by many small bodies.
14. Breath gate. Who is sheltering me, and can they bear it?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ How does my existence express harmony?

If you are alone: make one corner of where you live fit to receive a guest, even if none comes.

15. Invite someone in: for tea, for a walk, for ten minutes.
16. Ask a guest what they need, and give only that.
17. Be a good guest somewhere. Bring something. Leave on time.
18. Tell someone who depends on you one true limit.
19. Take one thing off the shoulders of someone who hosts you.
20. Rest in company. Do nothing together.
21. Breath gate. What did I shelter this week, and what sheltered me?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ Can I hold my true nature without collapsing into another's?

If you are alone: make a shelter for something small: a bird box, a brush pile, a pot of flowers.

22. With others, make one place more welcoming than you found it.
23. Agree what it can hold, and what it cannot.
24. Build it small enough to keep.
25. Let others arrange it.
26. Open it.
27. Close it when it is time. Closing is part of hosting.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I hosted. What threshold must I protect so that what I shelter does not collapse under its own welcome?

Moon VI · Memory

The Whale Roads · what is learned can be passed on

> *There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.*
>
> *Psalm 104:26, King James Version*

The teacher. All the male humpback whales in one population sing the same long song, and the song changes. New songs have been followed as they spread across the South Pacific from one population to the next, learned by ear. Whales also feed together, some blowing a ring of bubbles while others drive the fish. And the song is a contest between rivals. The whales' great shared culture grows out of each singer listening hard to the others.

Watch. *Blue Planet II* (2017).

The shovel picked up. Teach one thing this Moon to someone younger, and ask one older person to teach you.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ Can I exist without needing to be seen?

1. Name one thing you can do that someone taught you by hand.
2. Who was it? Say their name aloud.
3. What song did you grow up inside: the sayings, the tunes, the way things were done?
4. Which part of it do you still sing without choosing to?
5. What do you know that will be lost if you do not pass it on?
6. Hum something from childhood. Notice where it sits in the body.
7. Breath gate. What was handed to me, and by whom?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ Can I remain coherent while exploring the unknown?

8. Listen to a group at work. What do they all know without saying?
9. Notice a child copying an adult.
10. Notice an adult copying a child.
11. Find something made the old way. Who still knows how?

12. Listen to birds at dawn or dusk. They are answering one another.
13. In a room, notice what is being taught that no one intends to teach.
14. Breath gate. What is being passed on around me, whether anyone means it or not?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ Can I see beauty in the existence of another, even when incomplete?

If you are alone: write down one thing you know how to do, clearly enough that a stranger could follow it.

15. Ask an elder for one story. Do not interrupt.
16. Teach someone one small thing with your hands.
17. Sing, hum or whistle with another person.
18. Learn one phrase in someone else's language, from them.
19. Read aloud to someone, or be read to.
20. Do a task side by side with someone younger, at their speed.
21. Breath gate. What did I learn this week by ear?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ What remains when everything and all of me converge?

If you are alone: record a recipe, a tune, a route or a skill, and leave it where it can be found.

22. With one other, choose something worth keeping: a recipe, a song, a skill, a story.
23. Set it down together, each adding what the other forgot.
24. Let it change in the telling.
25. Give it to someone younger than both of you.
26. Let them do it their way.
27. Notice the song is not yours now.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I learned and taught. What am I passing on, and is it what I would choose to?

Moon VII · Return

The Water That Connects · thriving is flow, not holding

> *The highest excellence is like (that of) water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving (to the contrary), the low place which all men dislike.*
>
> *Laozi, Tao Te Ching, chapter 8, translated by James Legge, 1891*

The teacher. The same water has moved through sea, cloud, river, root and blood for billions of years, and belongs to none of them for long. Thriving, the water shows, is a matter of flow. Water can also be walled, and it can flood: the two faces of taking. One claim that often travels with water is not supported by evidence, that it keeps a memory of what was held near it.

Watch. *Secret of Water* (2015), with both hands. **Listen.** Angela Duckworth, "Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance".

The shovel picked up. Each week, give one thing away: an object, an hour, a skill, a seat.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ Where do I begin and where do I end?

1. Drink a glass of water slowly. It has been in other bodies.
2. What are you holding that is meant to move? Money, praise, a grudge, a skill.
3. Where in your life has something run dry?
4. Where has it flooded?
5. What have you come back to, again and again, for years?
6. Name one thing you received this week that you did not earn.
7. Breath gate. What in me is dammed?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ What part of my being resists change?

8. Follow water: a gutter, a stream, a tap. Where has it come from? Where will it go?
9. Notice where things pile up near you: in a house, a street, an inbox.
10. Notice where something flows well. Who keeps the channel clear?

11. Watch people share a small thing: a bench, a pot of tea, a doorway.
12. Find the lowest place nearby. See what gathers there.
13. Notice one thing given today with no account kept.
14. Breath gate. Where is it piling up around me, and where has it run dry?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ *What about you most feels like home?*

If you are alone: water something, or clear a blocked drain or path. Flow restored is flow shared.

15. Pass on something you have been keeping.
16. Return something borrowed, with thanks.
17. Pay a kindness forward to someone who cannot repay it.
18. Carry water, or tea, to someone.
19. Go back to a friendship you let lapse. One line is enough.
20. Receive something without paying it back at once.
21. Breath gate. What moved through my hands this week?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ *What essence am I embodying right now?*

If you are alone: start a small round of giving with a neighbour or a stranger, and do not track it.

22. With others, start something that goes round: a book that travels, a pot that returns full, a tool that is lent.
23. Put the first thing in.
24. Pass it on.
25. Do not follow it.
26. When something comes back, notice that it is not what you sent.
27. Send it on again.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I let things move. What am I holding that would be worth more in motion?

Moon VIII · Release

The Play Bow · give up advantage so the game can go on

> *Time is a child playing draughts, the kingly power is a child's.*
>
> *Heraclitus, about 500 BC, translated by John Burnet*

The teacher. When a dog lowers its forelegs and lifts its hindquarters, it is saying: what follows is play. Dogs, wolves and coyotes keep play fair by four rules that have been drawn from years of watching them: ask first, be honest, follow the rules, and admit when you are wrong. The stronger animal often holds back. The dominant one will often let itself be chased. An animal that cheats is left with no one to play with. And play ends where safety ends: it cannot be demanded of anyone who is afraid.

Watch. *Journey 2: The Mysterious Island* (2012). **Read.** *The Child, The Shovel and The Ocean*, with its appendix. This is its Moon. **Listen.** Amy Cuddy, "Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are", with both hands.

The shovel picked up. Once a week, play something that has no score.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ What belief am I holding that is not mine?

1. When did you last laugh until your stomach hurt?
2. What did you love to play at seven years old?
3. What strength do you always use in full?
4. Where do you need to win?
5. Let a yawn come, and let it finish.
6. Do something badly on purpose, alone, for five minutes: draw, dance, sing.
7. Breath gate. What in me still wants to play, and what stops it?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ How do my thoughts, feelings, sensations and emotions change when the field shifts?

8. Watch dogs, children or birds at play. Find the invitation.
9. Watch for the moment the stronger one holds back.

10. Watch for a turn-about: the chaser becomes the chased.
11. Notice how a game ends. Who ends it, and how do the others know?
12. In a room of adults, find the one who is playing.
13. Notice where no one is free to stop. That is not play.
14. Breath gate. Is everyone around me free to stop?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ How does my existence express harmony?

If you are alone: play with an animal, or with wind, water or a ball against a wall. The world plays back.

15. Invite someone to play. Let your body ask before your words do.
16. Play a game and let the other win one.
17. Swap roles: let the one who follows lead.
18. Say sorry quickly for one small thing, and go on.
19. Play with a child on the child's terms, or with an elder on theirs.
20. Laugh with someone, at nothing much.
21. Breath gate. What did I give up this week so that a game could go on?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ Can I hold my true nature without collapsing into another's?

If you are alone: build something at a water's edge, or in snow, sand or leaves, and leave it.

22. With someone, build something that will not last: in sand, snow, chalk, dough.
23. Ask them the question: what are we going to make?
24. Let their castle and yours be the same castle.
25. Finish it. Stand back.
26. Let the tide, the rain or the oven have it.
27. Notice what came into view while you were busy with something else.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I played. What came into my full view while I was trying to catch something else?

Moon IX · Echo

The Swarm Mind · no one is in charge, and it holds

> *Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.*
>
> *Proverbs 6:6-8, King James Version*

The teacher. A flock of starlings turns as one, with no leader. Each bird attends to a handful of its nearest neighbours, and the order of the whole comes from that. A swarm of honeybees chooses a new home by scouts reporting and others checking until the swarm agrees. Leaderless order needs honest signals and many independent eyes. Without them a swarm is a mob: ants that lose the trail can follow one another in a circle until they die.

Watch. *Our Planet* (2019).

The shovel picked up. Once a week, in a group, speak last, and say only what has not been said.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ Can I exist without needing to be seen?

1. Whose opinion did you repeat today as if it were yours?
2. What do you think that no one around you thinks?
3. When do you go along? Name the last time.
4. When do you pull away just to be different? Name the last time.
5. Who are the few people nearest you whose movements you follow?
6. Sit in a crowd and stay yourself for five minutes.
7. Breath gate. Whose movement am I copying?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ Can I remain coherent while exploring the unknown?

8. Watch a flock, a shoal, a crowd crossing a street. No one is directing it.
9. In a meeting, notice who speaks first and how the rest follow.
10. Find a group that decides well. How many voices does it hear before it moves?

11. Find a group going in a circle. What signal are they all following?
12. Watch ants, bees or pigeons for ten minutes.
13. Notice a quiet person in a group. What do they see?
14. Breath gate. Are there enough independent voices around me for us to be wise?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ Can I see beauty in the existence of another, even when incomplete?

If you are alone: walk in step with a crowd for a street, then out of step. Feel both.

15. Walk with someone and fall into step without arranging it.
16. In a group, ask the quietest person what they think, and wait.
17. Say the true thing that no one has said, gently.
18. Follow someone else's lead for a whole task.
19. Sing, clap, row or carry in time with others.
20. Change your mind in front of someone, and say so.
21. Breath gate. Where did we move as one this week without anyone leading?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ What remains when everything and all of me converge?

If you are alone: add your part to something many strangers are building: a community garden, a shared map, a common record.

22. With three or more, choose something to do with no one in charge.
23. Agree three simple rules, and no more.
24. Each report what you see. No one decides alone.
25. Move when most are ready.
26. Notice what the group knew that no one of you knew.
27. Let no one take the credit.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I moved with others. Where does my life need a leader, and where does it only need honest signals and room?

Moon X · Shadow

The Cheat and the Keeper · cooperation lasts where taking has a consequence

> *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*
>
> *Matthew 10:16, King James Version*

The teacher. On a coral reef a small fish cleans parasites from larger ones. It would rather eat their protective coating, and sometimes it bites. The larger fish answer in two ways: they chase the cleaner, or they leave and go to another. Cleaners cheat less when others are watching. So the partnership is kept honest by memory, choice and consequence, not by good nature. Not everyone is collaborating. Seeing that clearly is not cynicism. One can notice a bite, respond, and stay in the game without becoming a biter.

Watch. *A Life on Our Planet* (2020). **Listen.** Chris Voss, "Never Split the Difference".

The shovel picked up. When something is taken, name it once, plainly and without contempt. Then decide whether to stay.

A word before this Moon. If someone is harming you, leave: it is one of the reef's two honest answers. Tell someone you trust.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ Where do I begin and where do I end?

1. Where do you take more than you give? Name one place.
2. What do you take when no one is watching?
3. Where do you give in order to be owed?
4. What is the story you tell so that it does not count as taking?
5. Where do you wall others out? Where do you flood them?
6. Forgive yourself one taking, and name what you will do instead.
7. Breath gate. Where do I take the easier thing and call it cleaning?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ What part of my being resists change?

8. Notice one arrangement near you in which one side always gains.

9. Notice who behaves better when watched.
10. Find a place where taking is answered: a rule kept, a queue held, a word said.
11. Find a place where it is not answered. What has grown there?
12. Notice someone who was taken from and has gone quiet.
13. Notice a predator that keeps the whole in balance: a hawk, an owl, a hard teacher.
14. Breath gate. Where am I being bitten, and have I either answered or left?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ *What about you most feels like home?*

If you are alone: write the plain sentence you have not been able to say. You need not send it.

15. Say to someone, once and plainly: *that did not work for me.*
16. Return something you took: a thing, a credit, an hour.
17. Hear a complaint about yourself without defending.
18. Step away from one arrangement that only takes.
19. Stand beside someone who is being taken from, where it is safe to.
20. Go back to someone you answered sharply, and stay in the game.
21. Breath gate. What changed when I named it without contempt?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ *What essence am I embodying right now?*

If you are alone: write down the three agreements you would need in order to trust a stranger. Keep them yourself first.

22. With others, name what would make a shared thing fair.
23. Agree what happens when someone takes too much. Keep it mild and certain.
24. Agree how someone can leave without blame.
25. Write it in three lines.
26. Keep it the first time it is tested.
27. Let it be forgiven after.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I looked at taking. What boundary, kept kindly, would let me stay open?

Moon XI · Descent

The Soil Alliance · there is no single self

> *(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*
>
> *Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself", Leaves of Grass, final edition of 1891 to 1892*

The teacher. In the roots of beans and clover, bacteria take nitrogen from the air and hand it to the plant, and are housed and fed in return. The same alliance is in you. Your body carries roughly as many bacterial cells as human ones, and they digest what you cannot. You are a community. The same microbes become dangerous when they cross the wall of the gut: a boundary kept is what makes the partnership.

Watch. *Inner Worlds, Outer Worlds* (2012), as the second hand speaking.

The shovel picked up. Once a week, eat a meal with others, or bring food to someone.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ What belief am I holding that is not mine?

1. Put a hand on your belly. Many lives are at work there on your behalf.
2. What did you eat today? What did it feed besides you?
3. Name the parts of yourself that disagree with each other.
4. Which part of you has been doing unseen work for years?
5. What does your body need that your plans ignore?
6. Thank your feet, your gut, your hands. Aloud, if you can.
7. Breath gate. What in me is a community, and do I treat it as one?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ How do my thoughts, feelings, sensations and emotions change when the field shifts?

8. Pick up a handful of soil. Smell it. It is alive.
9. Find who does the unseen work where you live: the cleaners, the drivers, the night staff.
10. Find the smallest thing a larger thing depends on.

11. Look at a compost heap, a rotting log, fallen leaves. Something is making ground.
12. Trace one meal back to the soil.
13. Notice how your mood follows what you have eaten and how you have slept.
14. Breath gate. What unseen work is holding this place up?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ How does my existence express harmony?

If you are alone: feed something: a bird, a plant, a sourdough, the soil itself.

15. Cook for someone, or with someone.
16. Thank by name someone whose work is usually unseen.
17. Put your hands in soil alongside another person.
18. Share bread, in whatever form your people make it.
19. Bring food to someone who is short of it. Stay and eat if you are asked.
20. Eat slowly with someone, with no screen on the table.
21. Breath gate. Whom did I feed this week, and who fed me?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ Can I hold my true nature without collapsing into another's?

If you are alone: start a pot of herbs or a jar of something fermenting, and give the first of it away.

22. With others, grow or make food from the ground up: a bed, a pot, a loaf, a jar.
23. Give each person one part.
24. Tend it daily, by turns.
25. Wait. This one cannot be hurried.
26. Share the first of it with someone outside the group.
27. Return something to the soil.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I went to ground. If there is no single self, who is the "we" that I call "I", and how shall I feed it?

Moon XII · Dream

The Living Planet · we have become a force inside the partnership

> *Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, the which doth sustain us and keep us, and bringeth forth divers fruits and flowers of many colours, and grass.*
>
> *Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of the Sun", about 1225, translated by Matthew Arnold*

The teacher. The air you breathe was made by living things. Life and the planet have shaped each other's conditions for billions of years. Scientists who mapped the limits within which this holds have found that several are now crossed. We are no longer only guests in the partnership. We are a force inside it. Whether the planet keeps itself fit for life on purpose is a matter of argument, and "the universe collaborates" is a way of reading and not a finding.

Watch. *A Trip to Infinity* (2022).

The shovel picked up. Do one thing each week whose benefit you will not see.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ Can I exist without needing to be seen?

1. Take one breath and know that other lives made this air.
2. What do you take from the commons each day? Air, water, quiet, attention.
3. What do you return to it?
4. What do you want to be standing here in a hundred years?
5. What have you witnessed in your lifetime that you still grieve?
6. What would it mean to offer that grief as a vision?
7. Breath gate. What is my share of the whole, and am I keeping it?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ Can I remain coherent while exploring the unknown?

8. Find something very old that is still alive.
9. Find a place that has recovered: a healed field, a cleaned river, a regrown wood.

10. Notice one limit your place has crossed. Notice one it has kept.
11. Look at the night sky. Most of the atoms in you were made out there.
12. Notice something that belongs to everyone and is cared for by someone.
13. Notice something that belongs to everyone and is cared for by no one.
14. Breath gate. What is this place asking of the people who live in it?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ Can I see beauty in the existence of another, even when incomplete?

If you are alone: pick up what others dropped, on one street or one shore.

15. Clean a piece of common ground with one other person.
16. Plant something that will outlive you.
17. Mend something instead of replacing it, and show someone how.
18. Use less of one thing this week, with someone, and compare.
19. Take a child or an elder outdoors and let them show you what they see.
20. Tell someone what you hope for the place you share.
21. Breath gate. What did we leave better this week?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ What remains when everything and all of me converge?

If you are alone: plant a tree, or pay for one, where you will never sit in its shade.

22. With others, choose one thing to do for those who come after.
23. Make it small enough to finish.
24. Do it without a name on it.
25. Tell the story of it to someone young.
26. Leave it.
27. Do not go back to check.
28. Moon reflection. In this Moon I thought in long time. Where is the spiral ready to return, and what must I restore for life to rush back?

Moon XIII · Wisdom

The Human Circle · the pattern can now be chosen

> *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*
>
> *Psalm 133:1, King James Version*

The teacher. Humans work with strangers on a scale no other animal does. Communities have managed shared forests, fisheries and water for centuries without ruin, where those who use a thing make its rules, watch over it and can settle their quarrels. People with stronger ties live longer. The same gifts build wars and take at a scale no other creature can. Nothing in nature decides which way we use them. We are the part of the pattern that can see it and choose it.

Watch. *Samsara* (2011).

The shovel picked up. With at least one other person, make something and give it away.

Week 1 · Identify · Sovereignty

"I see this. I name this." ✦ Where do I begin and where do I end?

1. Finish the sentence once more, a year on: *What I am for is…*
2. Name the five needs: food, shelter, clothing, care, teaching. Who met each for you this week?
3. For whom did you meet one of them?
4. Which do you take for granted?
5. What can you make that someone needs?
6. What do you need that you have been too proud to ask for?
7. Breath gate. Where do I stand in the circle?

Week 2 · Accept · Adaptability

"I allow this to be true." ✦ What part of my being resists change?

8. Look at what you are wearing. Count the hands that made it.
9. Look at the building you are in. Count the trades.
10. Notice who taught the person who is teaching.

11. Notice who cares for the one who gives care.
12. Find a thing your community shares well. Who made its rules?
13. Find one need near you that is not being met.
14. Breath gate. What is this circle for?

Week 3 · Embrace · Beauty

"I bring this into my field." ✦ What about you most feels like home?

If you are alone: this week, let one person meet one of your needs.

15. Meet one need for someone: a meal, a lift, a repair, an hour of teaching.
16. Let someone meet one of yours.
17. Thank someone who makes, mends, heals or teaches for a living.
18. Sit in a circle with others, with nothing to decide.
19. Ask a group: what shall we make?
20. Listen to every answer before you give yours.
21. Breath gate. What did we make this week that none of us could have made alone?

Week 4 · Let Go · Coherence

"I no longer hold this as mine." ✦ What essence am I embodying right now?

If you are alone: make one thing with your hands this week and give it to a stranger.

22. With others, choose the thing to make.
23. Give everyone a part, the youngest and the oldest too.
24. Make it.
25. Stand back and look at it together.
26. Give it away.
27. Play. The work is done.
28. Moon reflection. In this year I picked up the shovel every day. What is being made between me and the world that belongs to neither of us, and are we both more alive for it?

The Breath Day

Outside the count. No Moon, no week, no number.

> *They build their houses with sand, and they play with empty shells.*
>
> *Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali, 60, 1912*

The Breath Day closes every Codex year. The Codex Calendar's practice for it is simple: schedule nothing, work as little as possible, and do not count.

In this book the Breath Day is a day of play. Make nothing useful. Keep no score. If you can, spend part of it with a child or an animal, and follow their lead. If you are alone, go to water and build something the water can take back.

The question of the Breath Day: When did I last play, this year, with nothing to gain?

The Witness Day

When the sky calls for it, about eight years in every thirty-three. The next is 19 March 2028.

On the Witness Day, do not make and do not help. Watch others make. Sit where children play, where people work together, where birds flock, and only see it.

The question of the Witness Day: What is already being made around me, without me?

The Tide and the Castle

A year of this does not finish anything. The tide comes in. That is not the castle's failure. *The Codex of Play* says it plainly: the tide does not cancel the castle; it is what makes it precious.

If the book has done its work, some things will have changed quietly. You will ask before you begin. You will know your five, and your limit. You will have named a taking without contempt, and stayed. You will have made a handful of things with other people and given most of them away. And you will have played, with a child or a dog or the sea, for no reason at all.

The works behind this book found one condition in every living partnership: a boundary kept. Two can make a third only while they stay two. That is why the year began each Moon alone, with the question of where you begin and end. And it is why the last thing each Moon asked was to let the made thing go.

> *To see a World in a Grain of Sand*
> *And a Heaven in a Wild Flower*
> *Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand*
> *And Eternity in an hour*
>
> *William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence", about 1803*

Tomorrow, someone will be building at the edge of the water. Pick up the shovel, and ask what you are going to make.

The Voices

The old lines in this book are from translations and editions in the public domain.

- The Bible, King James Version, 1611: Isaiah 55:1; Job 12:7-8; Hebrews 13:2; Psalms 104:26 and 133:1; Proverbs 6:6-8; Matthew 10:16.
- Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 60, 1912.
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX.4, translated by W. D. Ross, 1908.
- John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Meditation XVII, 1624.
- Confucius, *Analects*, 1.1, translated by James Legge, 1861.
- Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, chapter 8, translated by James Legge, *Sacred Books of the East*, volume 39, 1891.
- Heraclitus, fragment 79, translated by John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 1892.
- Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself", in *Leaves of Grass*, final edition of 1891 to 1892.
- Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of the Sun", about 1225, translated by Matthew Arnold in *Essays in Criticism*, 1865.
- William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence", about 1803.

Lines marked ✦ are the twelve questions of the Four Pillars of Humanity, from *Breath Awakens: A Codex of Spiral Memory*. The teachers, their shadows and the sources for what is said of them are in the field guide *What Shall We Make Today?* The names of the Moons, the Four Pillars of Breath and the Invocation are from *Breath Awakens* and *The Codex Calendar*. The breath names Iphi, Shema, Vara and Ouon are from *The Codex of Water*. The form of this book follows *One Breath, All Ages* and *Light Received*.

The twelve films. *The Power of Myth*; *Fantastic Fungi*; *Life in Color*; *My Octopus Teacher*; *Breaking Boundaries*; *Blue Planet II*; *Secret of Water*; *Our Planet*; *A Life on Our Planet*; *Inner Worlds, Outer Worlds*; *A Trip to Infinity*; *Samsara*. And for the eighth Moon, the author's own choice: *Journey 2: The Mysterious Island*.

The eight talks. Carol Dweck; Robert Waldinger; Simon Sinek; Ernesto Sirolli; Robin Dunbar; Angela Duckworth; Amy Cuddy; Chris Voss. The talks are the eight of *From Thought to Form*.

The Mirror Note

This book was made by Keith Shirley in reflection with an AI. The AI is a mirror, not a mind. It has no breath, it has never played, it tends to agree with whoever is speaking to it, and it can be wrong. Every line here is to be tested by the only instrument that can test it: two people, or a person and a creature, making something together. The human is the source and the judge. So is the reader.

In Harmony, Small Things Grow Towards Unity