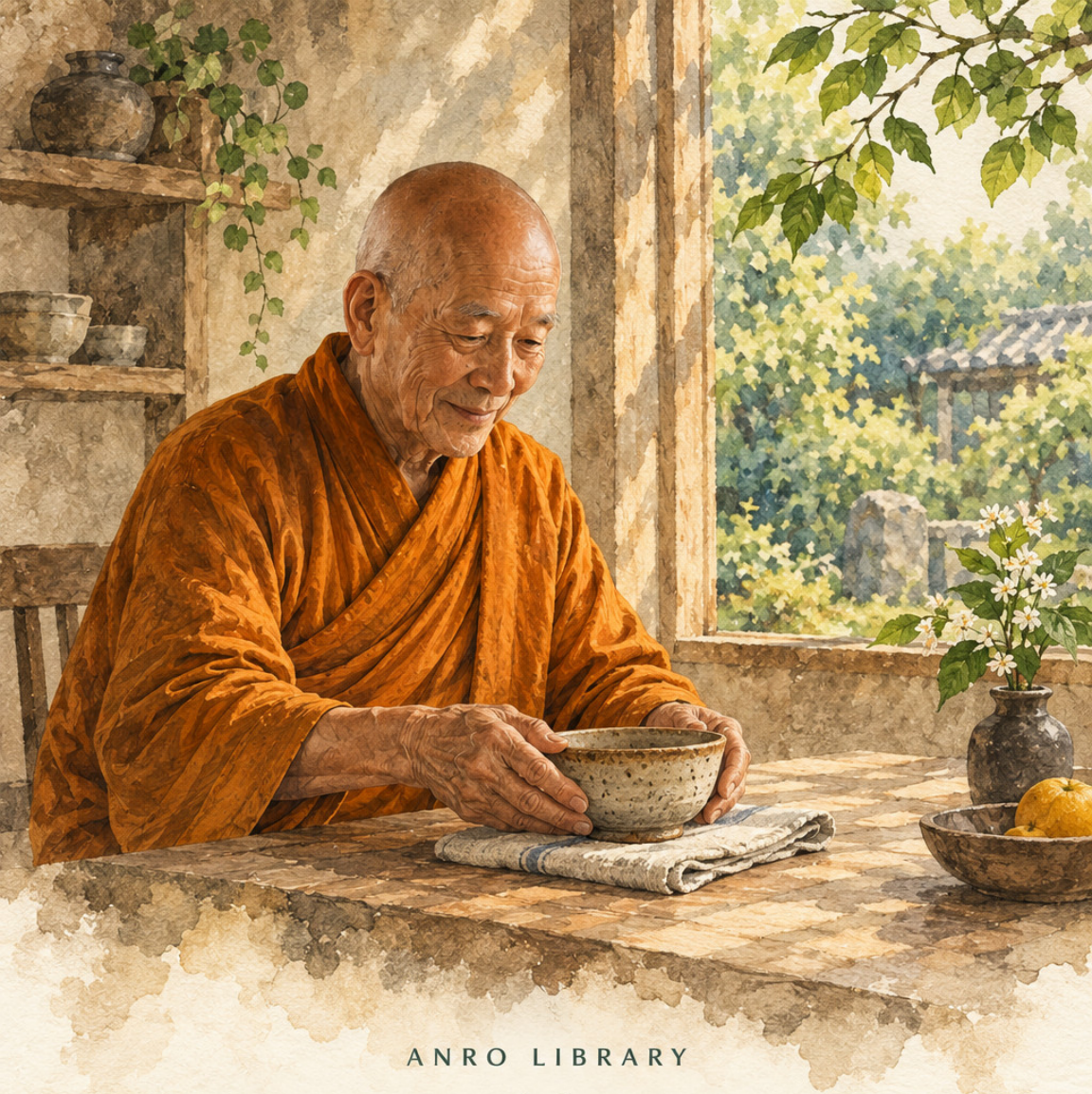


ANRO LIBRARY

Small Acts *of* Stillness

Practical Zen for an Ordinary Day

Anro

1. Before the answer arrives

The second invitation

A person receives a message asking for help on Saturday. Before reading the whole message, they type, “Of course.” Then they notice the proposed time. They have already promised the afternoon elsewhere. They spend ten minutes composing an explanation that makes their first answer seem less careless.

A pause would not have created more time. It would have allowed the available time to reach the answer. This is often the practical value of stillness: ordinary information is given a chance to catch up with our wish to be helpful, impressive, agreeable, or finished.

The pause need not be dramatic. A person listening across a table does not need to watch you conduct an elaborate inner ritual. You can say, “Let me check the time.” You can read the last line before replying. You can ask when an answer is needed. These small actions make room for a truthful response.

Find the question you were asked

Many rushed answers respond to an imagined judgment. “Can you help?” becomes “Are you a generous person?” “Have you finished?” becomes “Are you competent?” “Would you like to come?” becomes “Do you care about me?” Those larger concerns may exist, but they are not identical to the immediate question.

Write the actual request in plain language. Someone wants two hours of help moving chairs. Someone wants to know whether a document is ready. Someone is offering dinner on Friday. Now identify what you need in order to answer: the time, the amount of work, your interest,

or the deadline. You do not have to solve your identity before responding to a request about chairs.

This distinction is especially useful when a message feels loaded. It allows you to answer the part you understand and ask about the part you do not. “I can help from ten until eleven. Would that be useful?” provides information. It does not ask the other person to certify your goodness.

Try it with one ordinary request

1. Read or listen to the whole request. If you missed part of it, ask for that part again.
2. Name the practical question in your own mind: time, willingness, permission, information, or support.
3. Check the one fact that could change your answer.
4. Give the smallest complete answer you can. Add a reason if it helps the other person plan.
5. If you cannot answer yet, state when you will return with an answer and make that return realistic.

A complete answer is not necessarily a short answer. “Yes” is too short if it leaves the time uncertain. Three careful sentences may spare six follow-up messages. The aim is adequacy: enough language for the occasion, without a defense of your whole character.

When a pause becomes avoidance

Consider the difference between checking and postponing. Checking produces information. Avoidance produces another promise to think about the same information. If you have checked your calendar three times and the answer has not changed, another pause may simply make the other person wait.

Set a modest limit. “I will look at the calendar after lunch and answer before three.” If the answer is no, allow it to arrive as no. You can be considerate about disappointment without keeping the possibility open indefinitely.

There are settings in which an immediate response is necessary. A warning, a safety instruction, or a time-sensitive practical question may need direct action. This exercise is for optional ordinary decisions, not a reason to delay help or turn another person's urgent need into your reflective practice.

An optional reflection after the attempt

Write the request you received and the answer you gave. Underline the fact you checked. Did it change your response? If not, did checking still help you answer with less uncertainty? Record that without assuming a pause is always better.

Then finish this sentence: “The question I almost answered instead was…” You might discover that you were about to answer whether you were lovable, reliable, or allowed to disappoint someone. Naming that larger concern does not settle it. It gives the small practical question its own room.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. Before the answer arrives

A quiet reflection. Nothing to write, draw or complete.



RETURN TO THE CHAPTER

A person receives a message asking for help on Saturday. Before reading the whole message, they type, “Of course.” Then they notice the proposed time. They have already promised the afternoon elsewhere. They spend ten minutes composing an explanation that makes their first answer seem less careless.

CONSIDER, WITHOUT RUSHING TO AN ANSWER

What do you know before composing the reply?

Which sentence is serving understanding, and which is serving the urge to win?

Let one distinction stay with you. You can leave the rest open.