The Lute Strings - An Already Here Adventure

A choose-your-own-adventure practice book

An original temple welcome, complete practices, and choices you can follow on paper.

Begin at The temple garden on page 2.

Scenes are shuffled. Follow the page numbers at the end of each scene. You can stop or change direction whenever you choose.

The temple garden

An original fictional welcome

You step through a small gate into a well-kept garden. Beyond it stands a small but beautiful Theravada Buddhist temple. Inside, one man sits in meditation. His face resembles Siddhartha as you have seen him imagined in art. Incense is burning. Three meditation pads lie before him.

You may sit or move on. If you sit, he opens his eyes, smiles, and greets you: “Welcome. The path is wide. You may begin with your own ordinary experience, and see what it reveals.”

Your adventure

The Lute Strings. Soṇa considers leaving the training. A remembered instrument offers a way to reconsider effort.

“Try each invitation gently. You can question it, change direction, rest, or leave. Keep what helps and let the rest go. Ancient wisdom is an invitation to investigate, not a promise of an experience.”

Reading this book

Start using either choice below. After that, follow the page numbers rather than reading straight through. Scenes are deliberately shuffled; one scene may run over several pages. Choices appear at its end. In a PDF reader you can also click them. Keep a finger or bookmark at your current page when you pause. Two optional meetings with the man lead back to the exact scene you left.

Story and practice

The source story follows its recorded direction. Modern practice pauses and the temple framing are editorial additions, not episodes from the original story.

Detailed adaptation notes and gaps are available at the back of the book, so the telling can unfold without stopping for every editorial explanation.

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Sit, listen, and begin - turn to page 15.

Move on and enter the adventure - turn to page 15.

Optional: read how this telling was made - turn to page 35.

Practice pause · Let useful thinking rest

The source describes a long training in a few lines. Your pause belongs to ordinary life: give one manageable action the attention it needs, without claiming Sona's result.

The next part can wait while the lesson meets an ordinary choice. This editorial addition stays close to a real, manageable situation rather than asking you to reproduce the events or achievements in the telling.

Practice pause

Let useful thinking rest

1. Notice

After dealing with immediate needs, notice what your thinking is doing.

2. Distinguish

Is the current commentary useful, or simply continuing?

3. Watch

If it can wait, leave it alone and attend to an ordinary breath or comfortable sitting.

4. Release

Return to thinking when useful. No blankness is required.

5. Return

Let the exploration end. Notice your surroundings and the support beneath you. Resume ordinary activity when you feel ready.

6. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source's reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Relaxation of thoughts

Soṇa and the lute strings

Two sorts of thinking

Choose what comes next

Continue to the next practice pause - turn to page 13.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Practice pause · Arriving, present, gone

A remembered teaching becomes useful when it changes how you respond. Consider what can be carried into one task after the book is closed.

The story is nearing its ending, but your day has its own pace. This editorial addition asks whether anything small can travel with you into that day. It need not resemble the result reported in the account.

Practice pause

Arriving, present, gone

1. Notice

Choose a naturally occurring sound or breath.

2. Distinguish

Notice its arrival, its presence, and any ending you can discern.

3. Watch

If you miss a stage, leave it missed. Do not reconstruct it as direct observation.

4. Release

Return to the room without waiting for another event.

5. Return

Let the exploration end. Notice your surroundings and the support beneath you. Resume ordinary activity when you feel ready.

6. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source's reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Establishing mindfulness

Mindfulness of breathing

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue to the next practice pause - turn to page 19.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Too loose is not tuned

Between the two failures is a tension that can be used. When the strings are properly tuned, the instrument is responsive. Its readiness is not measured by how close a string comes to breaking. Nor is readiness the absence of all tension. The teacher turns this familiar understanding toward Sona's effort.

Too much driving can stir up agitation. Too little can sink into inertia. Sona is invited to find a workable pitch and bring his other capacities into balance with it. The subject is still serious. What changes is the way he approaches it: not as a contest in force, but as a practice that must become responsive enough to continue.

Notice, without grading

Read at your own pace. The next two pauses are contemporary invitations, not recorded events in the source.

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue to a contemporary practice pause - turn to page 16.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

The garden does not hurry

An optional meeting - original fiction

You find the man beside the temple garden. He makes room for you to sit. This meeting is a pause in the adventure, not a required practice.

The man speaks

“A string too tight and a string too loose both lose their usefulness. Listen to the effects of your effort rather than judging it by how strenuous it feels.”

He smiles. “When you are ready, return to where you left the story.”

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Return to “Effort without release” - turn to page 15.

Practice pause · Knowing this position

A familiar source of support need not be a retreat from learning. Try this modern pause before deciding that the only possibilities are more force or giving up.

The telling remains open while you try another small invitation. This editorial addition does not ask you to decide what the characters should have felt. Let one ordinary experience of your own receive a little attention.

Practice pause

Knowing this position

1. Notice

Notice whether you are sitting, standing, walking, or lying down.

2. Distinguish

How do you know? Notice contact and position without adjusting them.

3. Watch

Stay with that ordinary knowledge briefly.

4. Release

Continue your activity; there is nothing to retain.

5. Return

Let the exploration end. Notice your surroundings and the support beneath you. Resume ordinary activity when you feel ready.

6. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source's reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Establishing mindfulness

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue the story - turn to page 27.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

You can leave the story here

Reading, resting, and living the rest of your day are also available. There is no obligation to finish this retelling or return to it.

The man makes no attempt to draw you back into the telling. A story can wait while a person meets the needs of a real day. Leave its characters where they are for now. If you return, the page can be opened without an apology for the time spent elsewhere.

Notice, without grading

Your previous place remains available in your account when signed in, or in this browser for guests when storage works.

An ordinary pause

You may close the book, explore ordinary life, and return to this page whenever you choose. Leaving can be part of walking the path.

Leaving the path

The man in the temple offers a quiet farewell. You can return to ordinary life now, or return to your bookmarked page another day. This pause is not a completed journey.

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Visit the temple again - turn to page 2.

Practice pause · Pleasant without holding

When a useful moment appears, there can be a temptation to hold it still. Let this practice keep the instrument responsive rather than fixed.

The man has not asked for a report. This editorial addition lets you listen to the effects of a practice privately. Keep what is usable, and leave what has become unnecessary work.

Practice pause

Pleasant without holding

1. Notice

Choose a pleasant contact, sound, or sight already present. Use a sense available to you; do not buy or create a stronger sensation.

2. Distinguish

Describe the detail itself, then notice any plan to repeat, improve, or prolong it. These may overlap.

3. Watch

Stay with the detail for a few seconds without adding another plan. Can you distinguish enjoyment from planning, or is the boundary unclear? You do not have to stop either.

4. Release

Enjoy what remains or move on freely.

5. Return

Let the exploration end. Notice your surroundings and the support beneath you. Resume ordinary activity when you feel ready.

6. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source’s reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

The arrow

Choose what comes next

Continue the story - turn to page 28.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Effort without release

One day lived with wisdom and reflection is better than a hundred years without understanding or self-control.

Sona has been trying hard. In the Cool Forest near Rajagaha, the effort that once seemed like devotion now feels like a wall he cannot get through. He thinks of the household he left, where there was enough wealth to live comfortably and do generous things. Perhaps he should return. He has worked, and still the freedom he sought has not arrived.

The teacher meets him at that point of discouragement. He does not begin by asking Sona to prove that he can endure more. He asks about an earlier part of Sona's life, when his hands knew a stringed instrument. Before becoming a monk, had he been a skilled player? Sona says that he had.

Notice, without grading

Read at your own pace. The next two pauses are contemporary invitations, not recorded events in the source.

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue to a contemporary practice pause - turn to page 23.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Optional: visit the man in the temple - the garden does not hurry - turn to page 9.

Practice pause · Three ordinary steps

The musician listens for a response rather than demanding a note. Approach this practice with that same curiosity about what the effort actually does.

Here the man allows a longer silence. This editorial addition can be tried without producing the lesson's supposed correct feeling. Notice what the invitation actually does, and stop if ordinary care asks for something else.

Practice pause

Three ordinary steps

1. Notice

Choose a clear, level place where walking is comfortable and safe.

2. Distinguish

As you walk normally, notice movement and foot contact. No slow-motion sequence is needed.

3. Watch

Know three steps as well as feels easy, keeping attention on your surroundings.

4. Release

Return to your usual walking. Skip this if balance needs your full attention.

5. Return

Let the exploration end. Notice your surroundings and the support beneath you. Resume ordinary activity when you feel ready.

6. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source's reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Establishing mindfulness

Mindfulness immersed in the body

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue to the next practice pause - turn to page 33.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Finding the pitch

You are responsible for guiding yourself; who else can do that for you?

Sona does not abandon the path, and he does not simply repeat the same struggle more loudly. He adjusts his effort and returns to practice. The account describes continued seclusion, care, and resolve before it reports his liberation. The tuning image opens a way forward; it does not replace the journey.

Later, he goes to speak with the Buddha about the change. His account reaches beyond a pleasant afternoon. He describes a freedom no longer dependent on persuading himself that ordinary attractions will complete him. What was once a frantic search for a result has given way, in the story, to a deep and lasting release.

Notice, without grading

Read at your own pace. The next two pauses are contemporary invitations, not recorded events in the source.

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue to a contemporary practice pause - turn to page 4.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Practice pause · Ease without a review

By training yourself well, you gain a guide that is hard to find.

The music does not need a final inspection of every string. Let the adventure end without testing whether you have become perfectly balanced.

For this last editorial addition, the man leaves room to finish. You can set down the exercise along with the book. An unfinished question may remain useful without being carried as an obligation.

Practice pause

Ease without a review

1. Notice

If an easy moment is present, notice it. If not, simply sit comfortably.

2. Distinguish

Distinguish ease from excitement about being calm or checking whether it will last.

3. Watch

Let that extra evaluation rest briefly. Notice what remains.

4. Release

Look around and continue your day. There is no state to preserve.

5. Return

Let the exploration end. Notice your surroundings and the support beneath you. Resume ordinary activity when you feel ready.

6. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source’s reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Mindfulness of breathing

Soṇa and the lute strings

Two sorts of thinking

Choose what comes next

Continue the story - turn to page 21.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Let the story rest

The retelling and its modern practice pauses can end here. You can read the full wisdom reference, return to ordinary activity, or explore another adventure.

The man closes the telling without turning its reported ending into a result you are expected to claim. The people in the old account have their own training and consequences. What you can carry is a question or an intention that meets your own ordinary life with a little more care.

Notice, without grading

Participation in these pauses does not establish the attainments described in the source.

Back at the temple

You return through the well-kept garden to the small temple. Incense drifts past the three meditation pads. The man opens his eyes, smiles, and welcomes you back.

The man speaks

You walked with the musician finding a workable tension. The next effort can be adjusted rather than forced or abandoned.

“You are welcome to walk another adventure, or return to ordinary life. There is nothing you need to prove before you go.”

An ending

To return to ordinary life, close the book here. Finishing marks participation, not an attainment.

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Sit in the temple and begin a fresh visit - turn to page 2.

Practice pause · A place to sit

Sona is close to judging the whole journey by this difficult stretch. Before following him further, meet your own present conditions without using them as a verdict on your worth.

The man pauses before the next part of the telling. You can try this editorial addition in the room where you are, without imagining yourself inside the historical event. There is time to notice what the beginning has stirred.

Practice pause

A place to sit

1. Notice

Sit in a position that feels comfortable. Notice where your body meets the seat.

2. Invite

Notice two points of contact: perhaps a hip and a thigh, or your back and the chair. Compare pressure or texture. Use another supported position if sitting is unavailable.

3. Listen

Make one small comfortable adjustment, or remain still and shift attention between those points. What changed in the contact, and what stayed the same? No posture needs to be achieved.

4. Respond

Let your attention move outward while the support remains beneath you.

5. Return

Let the exploration end. Notice your surroundings and the support beneath you. Resume ordinary activity when you feel ready.

6. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source's reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Establishing mindfulness

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue to the next practice pause - turn to page 10.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Optional: visit the man in the temple - carry only what helps - turn to page 32.

Practice pause · Conditions for quiet

The overtight string is a useful image for unnecessary effort. Let this exercise explore what can soften while you remain awake and involved.

The man leaves the story's image with you rather than explaining it again. This editorial addition is a chance to meet an everyday version of the question. A small, safe example will do.

Practice pause

Conditions for quiet

1. Notice

Sit comfortably somewhere you can pause safely.

2. Distinguish

Notice breathing and any unnecessary effort around it. Change position if needed.

3. Watch

Allow breathing to remain natural while effort softens if it can.

4. Release

End gently. A busy mind is not a failed attempt.

5. Return

Let the exploration end. Notice your surroundings and the support beneath you. Resume ordinary activity when you feel ready.

6. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source’s reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Mindfulness of breathing

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue to the next practice pause - turn to page 29.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

A remembered instrument

The conversation brings an instrument into the forest without anyone needing to carry one there. Remember the strings, the teacher asks in effect. What happens when they are pulled too tight? Sona knows immediately. The instrument is not ready for music. Tightness alone does not make a good note.

And when the strings hang too loose? That will not do either. The hand may make the movement of playing, but the instrument cannot answer as it should. Sona does not need a lecture about either mistake. The knowledge is already in his fingers, in the patient adjustments that used to happen before a melody could begin.

Notice, without grading

Read at your own pace. The next two pauses are contemporary invitations, not recorded events in the source.

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue to a contemporary practice pause - turn to page 25.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

The rest of the training

The teaching ends by distinguishing such freedom from claims made merely because someone trusts an authority, follows a reasoned view, or feels satisfied with an idea. Sona's declaration belongs to the full training and its reported outcome. It is not something this book asks you to claim.

What can remain in your hands is the musician's question. Does the effort you are making allow a useful response? Can it be adjusted when conditions change? A little slack may help one moment; a little renewed commitment may help another. Leave the instrument tuned for living rather than for displaying how hard you can pull.

Notice, without grading

Read at your own pace. The next two pauses are contemporary invitations, not recorded events in the source.

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Continue to a contemporary practice pause - turn to page 6.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Practice pause · Attention with a lighter touch

One day spent seeing the highest teaching is better than a hundred years without seeing it.

The loose string offers a different question. Is a small, workable intention available without turning it into a heroic promise?

Before the telling moves on, there is another way to approach this moment. As an editorial addition, the exercise belongs to your present life. You can adapt it or let it pass without changing anyone's part in the old story.

Practice pause

Attention with a lighter touch

Take care

Persistent, unexplained, or worsening fatigue deserves medical attention. Work within your care plan; never use these experiments to push through exhaustion or delayed symptom worsening. Keep your eyes open if helpful and breathe naturally. Stop if you become dizzy, panicked, disoriented, unusually detached, or overwhelmed. Look around, feel ordinary support, and seek help if the effects persist. Do not push through to prove readiness.

1. Prepare

2 minutes. Settle somewhere supported. Pick an available, neutral sensation such as the touch of a sleeve or an ordinary sound; avoid uncomfortable body areas. Choose a comfortable position and an optional gentle timer. Shorten any phase if needed.

2. Experiment

4 minutes. For one minute, gently keep the chosen detail in mind, returning without force. For the next minute, let it come and go without tracking it. Repeat those two minutes once. Notice effort in the brow, jaw, or shoulders without needing to change it. If any form of attention costs too much, spend the remaining time resting with eyes open.

3. Compare

2 minutes. Which condition felt less demanding? Distinguish a quieter mind from a less effortful way of meeting a busy mind. Keep the lighter option if useful.

4. Return

2 minutes. End the deliberate exercise. Look around, name where you are, and notice the chair or floor. Move comfortably if appropriate. Choose one ordinary next action and give yourself time before resuming it. Record a sentence only if useful; an unfinished exploration is enough.

5. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source’s reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Cultivating care and steadiness

Soṇa and the lute strings

The arrow

Choose what comes next

Continue the story - turn to page 8.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

Carry only what helps

An optional meeting - original fiction

You find the man beside the temple garden. He makes room for you to sit. This meeting is a pause in the adventure, not a required practice.

The man speaks

“Balance changes with conditions. Rest can support a return, and a small deliberate action can answer drift. You are adjusting a practice, not passing a test of worth.”

He smiles. “When you are ready, return to where you left the story.”

Sources and wisdom

Soṇa and the lute strings

Choose what comes next

Return to “Practice pause · A place to sit” - turn to page 24.

Practice pause · Stay

Balance is not a position you find once and defend forever. Notice whether a modest change in attention makes this moment more workable.

The turn in the story need not become a demand on you. This editorial addition offers another modest experiment. Something useful may appear; nothing in the characters' lives depends on whether it does.

Practice pause

Stay

1. Prepare

Choose a safe ordinary moment with no task demanding your attention. Decide what you expect to notice.

2. Experiment

Choose a sound or a point of comfortable contact. Stay with it for a few moments. When attention leaves, notice and return.

3. Compare

Distinguish noticing a departure from preventing one. An unnoticed interval is unknown, not proof of continuous attention.

4. Return

Let the experiment end. Return to your surroundings and ordinary activity. Keep observation separate from interpretation.

5. Make It Yours

If this works for you, make it part of your practice. If it does not, let it go.

Notice, without grading

What, if anything, was useful in this pause? The source's reported result is not a result the app can establish.

Sources and wisdom

Analysis of the path

Soṇa and the lute strings

Two sorts of thinking

Choose what comes next

Continue the story - turn to page 18.

Step off the path for now - turn to page 12.

How this telling was made

Original telling and modern practice

The temple man, present-day settings, connective descriptions, and reader choices are original literary framing. Historical stories retain their recorded direction. Dialogue is modern paraphrase, not a claimed historical quotation. Practice pauses are modern invitations; reading an outcome does not establish that outcome in the reader.

About the adaptation

An original short retelling of the cited discourse episode. Historical narrative is distinguished from contemporary practice invitations; no invented choices change the recorded events.

Story, practice, and the full source

The retelling follows the discourse's effort-and-instrument comparison. The modern exercises do not supply the full cultivation of the faculties or reproduce Soṇa's attainment. The bracketed injury detail in the linked translation is not used as part of this retelling or as a practice instruction.

A place to sit

supporting. A place to sit: Attending to ordinary physical experience can prepare bodily mindfulness. This modern sensory comparison omits the full mindfulness framework and does not establish insight.

Knowing this position

adaptation. Knowing this position: This invitation adapts an operation from the cited discourse: knowing the body. This modern sensory comparison omits the full mindfulness framework and does not establish insight.

Conditions for quiet

adaptation. Conditions for quiet: This invitation adapts an operation from the cited discourse: settling body and mind. Natural breathing and temporary ease do not cover the sixteen trainings or establish deep collectedness.

Attention with a lighter touch

supporting. Attention with a lighter touch: Allowing feeling while choosing care may support steadiness. Acceptance, soothing, or reduced distress alone does not establish source-based steadiness of mind or require accepting harm.

Three ordinary steps

adaptation. Three ordinary steps: This invitation adapts an operation from the cited discourse: knowing the body. This modern sensory comparison omits the full mindfulness framework and does not establish insight.

Stay

supporting. Stay: Recognizing an impulse and choosing a response can support cultivation of skillful qualities. Regulation or preference alone does not establish ethical skillfulness; all four efforts and consequences need consideration.

Let useful thinking rest

adaptation. Let useful thinking rest: This invitation adapts an operation from the cited discourse: settling body and mind. Natural breathing and temporary ease do not cover the sixteen trainings or establish deep collectedness.

Pleasant without holding

adaptation. Pleasant without holding: This invitation adapts an operation from the cited discourse: recognizing feeling and response. Acceptance, soothing, or reduced distress alone does not establish source-based steadiness of mind or require accepting harm.

Arriving, present, gone

adaptation. Arriving, present, gone: This invitation adapts an operation from the cited discourse: noticing change. Changes in viewpoint, naming, or boundaries do not establish not-self, nonduality, or release.

Ease without a review

adaptation. Ease without a review: This invitation adapts an operation from the cited discourse: settling body and mind. Natural breathing and temporary ease do not cover the sixteen trainings or establish deep collectedness.

Sources and wisdom

Analysis of the path

Cultivating care and steadiness

Establishing mindfulness

Mindfulness immersed in the body

Mindfulness of breathing

Relaxation of thoughts

Soṇa and the lute strings

The arrow

Two sorts of thinking

Choose what comes next

Return to the temple garden - turn to page 2.