

The Seven-Day Dopamine Reset: A Daoist Digital Decluttering Workbook

Introduction: What You're Holding Isn't a "Method" — It's an Experiment

Hello, I'm Ding Long.

I've been a lay Daoist priest for twenty-five years. "Lay priest" means exactly what it sounds like — I don't live on a remote mountain. I live right here in the world. I'm married, I buy groceries, I use a phone, I scroll through short videos. There's really only one difference between you and me: I know when to turn it off.

This workbook is not a "digital detox guide." To be honest, the word "detox" is far too light for what I have in mind. What I want to take you through is a seven-day Daoist experiment. The subject of the experiment is you. The hypothesis is this: you touch your phone eighty, a hundred, maybe two hundred times a day, but have you ever stopped to ask — before I reached for it, what was my state like in the first place?

Modern people find themselves in a strange predicament. We complain about information overload while swimming harder than anyone in the dopamine tide. And it's not your fault. That little rectangular block in your hand has several thousand of the world's smartest engineers working full-time to make sure you "can't stop." But you also have something in your hand that they didn't design — your awareness.

The Dao does not speak of "abstinence." Abstinence is force, and force rebounds. The Dao speaks of reduction — not resistance, but subtraction. Reduce until, at a certain point, you begin to see what was there all along: stillness, rhythm, bodily sensations, the things that actually matter.

Over these seven days, I won't make you meditate. I won't make you sit in lotus position. I won't make you practice qi gong. I'm going to ask you to do something even more foundational: stop, take a look, and then come back — with awareness.

Each day you'll receive a mission. Every day has homework. Every day has a hexagram — and don't worry, I'm not doing fortune-telling. A hexagram is a mirror. It helps you see clearly what stage you're in today.

Ready?

Let's begin.

Day 0: Before We Start

Today's Scripture

— **The five colors blind the eye. The five tones deafen the ear. The five flavors dull the palate. Racing and hunting drive the heart mad. Rare goods make people lose their way. Therefore the sage attends to the belly, not the eye — he lets go of that and chooses this.**

— *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 12

Ding Long's commentary:

Two thousand five hundred years ago, Laozi wrote a passage that describes, with eerie precision, exactly what you experience every time you scroll through your phone. "The five colors blind the eye" — the colors and information on your screen are so abundant that your eyes can no longer see what truly matters. "Racing and hunting drive the heart mad" — you swipe, refresh, and like without pause. Your heart has already gone mad, and you haven't even noticed. The sage attends to the belly, not the eye — a wise person feeds what they genuinely need, not what their eyes crave to gaze upon. Today, the first thing you'll do is find out just how much you're actually "gazing upon."

And a companion word from the Huangdi Neijing (The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic):

The sage does not treat illness once it has arrived, but treats it before it comes. They do not govern chaos once it has broken out, but govern before it arises.

You don't have "digital diabetes" yet. But every indicator is trending high. Today is your checkup.

Today's Challenge

Do a screen-use audit.

Open your phone settings. Find "Screen Time" or "Digital Wellbeing." Write down your daily usage for each of the past seven days. Then estimate: on average, how many times a day do you unlock your phone? And how long do you spend each time you unlock it?

Do not skip this step. When I guided a thirty-year-old programmer through this exercise, he swore to me, "Oh, I probably use it about two hours a day, give or take." We checked the data: five hours and forty-seven minutes. One hundred and thirty-two unlocks. He sat across from me in silence for a solid thirty seconds.

Numbers don't lie. The distance between you and the truth is exactly the gap between looking it up and guessing.

Write down these three numbers. On paper. Not in a notes app — with a pen:

Average daily screen time: ___ hours ___ minutes

Average daily unlocks: ___ times

The app that eats up the most time: ___

Body Awareness

We won't go deep into the meridian system just yet. For now, just one simple observation: right now, in this moment, how do your eyes feel?

Dry? Sore? Burning? Or have you never even noticed whether your eyes have a sensation at all?

The Neijing says: "The liver opens into the eyes." Your eyes aren't just two cameras — they're the external manifestation of your liver's condition. Staring at a screen for long stretches doesn't just hurt your eyes. It depletes your liver blood. If you've noticed that after a day of phone use you're more irritable, have trouble sleeping, or get tension headaches — that's not a coincidence.

You don't need to do anything about it today. You just need to start noticing.

Hexagram Journal

Day 0 has no hexagram. The hexagrams begin in earnest tomorrow. Today, you only need to do one thing: acknowledge.

Acknowledge that you might not be as self-controlled as you imagined. Acknowledge that your phone might know you better than you know yourself. Acknowledge that you want to change — because otherwise, you wouldn't still be reading this.

Write down your answers to these three questions:

When do I most often find myself reaching for my phone without thinking?

Is it usually because I genuinely need information — or is it a habitual "hand itch"?

If I left my phone in another room tonight, how would I feel? (Don't answer rationally. Write down the first emotion-word that surfaces.)

Evening Review

- The hardest part today: ____
- The most surprising thing: ____
- Tomorrow I will: ____

Key Takeaways

- You cannot reset what you don't measure. The first step is honest self-audit — check your actual screen time, not your imagined screen time.
 - The *Dao De Jing* warned us 2,500 years ago: excessive stimulation blinds the inner eye. Your scrolling habit isn't a personal failure — it's a predictable response to engineered inputs.
 - Today's only action: write down three numbers with a pen on paper. That's it. But do not skip it.
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Day 1: Stillness (止)

Today's Scripture

Block the openings, shut the gates, and to the end of your days you will not toil. Open the openings, multiply your affairs, and to the end of your days you will be beyond rescue.**

— *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 52

Ding Long's commentary:

"Openings" (dui) refers to the sense gates — your eyes, your ears, your mouth, every channel that reaches outward. "Block the openings, shut the gates" — plug the holes through which you leak outward, close the doors that lead to disturbance. Laozi says: if you can do this one thing, you won't spend your life rushing from one thing to the next. And the reverse? "Open the openings, multiply your affairs" — throw every gate wide open and scramble to deal with one thing after another — "to the end of your days you will be beyond rescue." You can't be saved.

Today, you're going to close the biggest opening of them all. For twenty-four hours.

Today's Challenge

Twenty-four hours, zero screens.

This is the hardest day of the entire seven days. Not "less." None. No phone, no tablet, no computer, no TV, no smartwatch — aside from answering phone calls, every screen goes dark.

Prepare in advance: let your family and friends know you'll be offline today. Turn off every notification on your phone. If you need an alarm, use a physical alarm clock or ask someone to wake you. Put your phone in a drawer. Close the drawer. Keep it out of sight.

My own experience:

The first time I tried going twenty-four hours without a screen was five years ago. The first six hours, I went through every withdrawal symptom you can imagine: restlessness, not knowing what to do with my hands, the recurring hallucination of "someone must be trying to reach me," five separate times I walked toward the drawer where my phone was and then turned back. Hours six through twelve, a strange kind of agitation set in — not about anything specific, just a diffuse, pervasive discomfort. At hour eighteen, I sat by the window with a cup of tea. Outside there was a ginkgo tree. I looked at it for forty minutes without thinking about anything. Forty minutes. I couldn't remember the last time I had looked at anything that way.

When the twenty-four hours ended, I turned my phone back on. Over a hundred messages. Not a single one was genuinely urgent.

Body Awareness

Here's what's happening in your body today — from the Nei Jing perspective:

The liver opens into the eyes. When you stop staring at a screen, your liver meridian gets an opportunity it hasn't had in a long time: repair. The liver stores blood, and the eyes receive blood and thus can see. The problem is that modern people's eyes are constantly "withdrawing" blood without ever paying it back to the liver.

Here's what you might experience today: your eyes go from dry to faintly itchy (the process of qi and blood re-nourishing the tissue), a wave of drowsiness around two or three in the afternoon (your liver meridian is working), feeling sleepy earlier than usual in the evening. This is a good thing. Your body is saying: thank you.

Write this down: which time of day was the hardest? At what point did something start to feel different?

Hexagram Journal

Today's Hexagram: ☶ Gen — Stillness (Mountain)

Gen is the Mountain. The image is of two mountains stacked one upon the other. The Yi Jing (I Ching) says: "Keeping his back still so that he no longer feels his body. Walking in his courtyard without seeing his people."

Ding Long's commentary: Gen is not about "not moving." It's about being able to stop when it's time to stop. Two mountains — one in front of you, one inside you. The reason you can't get over them isn't that they're too tall. It's that you've never stopped to consider that maybe you don't need to get over them at all. Today, what you stop is the screen. But the real Gen is stopping that impulse that says I always need to be looking at something.

Three self-inquiries:

What time of day did I most want to reach for my phone? What was I doing at that moment? What was I feeling?

During all those "gap moments" that the screen would normally fill — what did I do instead?

Has my relationship to the word "quiet" changed today?

Evening Review

- The hardest part today: ____
- The most surprising thing: ____
- Tomorrow I will: ____

Key Takeaways

- Day 1 is the hardest day — 24 hours with zero screens. The first 6 hours feel like withdrawal for a reason: your dopamine circuitry is recalibrating.
 - In Chinese medicine, the liver "opens into the eyes." Every hour you're not staring at a screen, your liver meridian gets a chance to repair itself. The sleepiness you feel tonight is not weakness — it's restoration.
 - Hexagram 52, Gen (Stillness): The mountain does not move because it has nowhere else to be. Today you learn what it feels like to be a mountain, not a notification.
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Day 2: Feeling the Withdrawal

Today's Scripture

|| **Reach the utmost emptiness. Hold firmly to stillness. The ten thousand things arise together — I simply watch their return.**

|| — *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 16

Ding Long's commentary:

"Reach the utmost emptiness" — empty out the clutter in your mind to its furthest limit. "Hold firmly to stillness" — guard that stillness, hold it with conviction. "The ten thousand things arise together — I simply watch their return" — outside, all things are operating, growing, clamoring, and I simply observe them cycling back to their source.

Laozi isn't telling you to escape the world. He's offering you an observational vantage point: when you are empty enough, still enough, you become capable of seeing the natural rhythms of all things — including the rhythms inside your own body. Your screen has been gone for twenty-four hours now. So settle in, get quiet, and observe: in the midst of withdrawal, what is your body actually trying to tell you?

Today's Challenge

Record the physical sensations of your withdrawal — in as much detail as you can.

Today's rule: screens remain off. But today isn't just about "getting through it." You're going to observe yourself the way a scientist observes a research subject.

Take out paper and pen. Every two to three hours, record the following:

- ****Palms****: Are they dry, or faintly sweating?
- ****Chest****: Is there an indescribable "itch" or a sensation of emptiness?
- ****Attention span****: How long can you focus? Do you find yourself looking for something to distract you?

u every few minutes?

- **Mood**: Irritable? Low? Or unexpectedly calm?
- **Body movements**: Are you unconsciously patting your pocket (looking for your phone), tapping your fingers on the table, or performing any "replacement behaviors"?

A case from my practice:

With one IT professional I worked with, at 11 a.m. on Day 2, he recorded sweaty palms, "a hole in my chest," and the impulse to pat his right pocket (where he normally kept his phone) every three minutes. By 3 p.m., he noticed he'd started eating snacks uncontrollably — not because he was hungry, but because his hands and mouth needed something to do. At 8 p.m., he said something that has stayed with me ever since: "I wasn't using my phone. My phone was using my body."

Your task today is not to "conquer" these sensations. It is to know them. Every withdrawal symptom is your body saying something to you that you haven't heard in a very long time.

Body Awareness

The Nei Jing teaches the *ziwu liuzhu* — the organ-meridian clock. Pay special attention today to:

Zi hour (23:00–01:00): The Gallbladder meridian is on duty.

The heaviest withdrawal symptoms often land between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m. This is not a coincidence. The Gallbladder meridian governs decision-making — all the choices you made during the day are processed here. At the zi hour, your Gallbladder meridian is "clearing the cache." When you've been bombarding your dopamine circuits all day, the Gallbladder meridian's cleanup workload at night is enormous. This is why you might sleep restlessly on the first or second night of withdrawal — it's not insomnia. It's your Gallbladder meridian working overtime.

If you have trouble falling asleep tonight, don't worry. Lying down with your eyes closed is already repair. What the Gallbladder meridian fears most isn't sleeplessness — it's being asleep while the mind keeps racing.

Record: how long did it take to fall asleep tonight? How many times did you wake during the night?

Hexagram Journal

Today's Hexagram: ☶ Bo — Stripping Away

The Bo hexagram: five yin lines below, a single yang line on top. It looks like something being peeled away, layer by layer. The Yi Jing says: "Bo is stripping away. The soft transforms the hard."

Ding Long's commentary: The withdrawal symptoms feel uncomfortable because you are in the process of being "stripped" — stripped of a layer of habit, stripped of a layer of dependency, stripped of things that aren't really you. Bo looks ominous, but it holds a secret: strip all the way down to the bottom, and what remains is the most solid thing there is. Your sweaty palms today, your restlessness — all of it is the outer layers peeling off. Don't rush to stick them back on.

Three self-inquiries:

What was the most uncomfortable physical sensation today? Try to **describe** it, not judge it.

If you didn't call this discomfort "suffering," what word would you use instead? (Hint: maybe "active," "shifting," "a signal" — find your own word.)

What is being stripped away? And beneath what's being stripped — what's starting to show?

Evening Review

- The hardest part today: ____
- The most surprising thing: ____
- Tomorrow I will: ____

Key Takeaways

- Withdrawal symptoms are not your enemy — they are data. Sweaty palms, restlessness, phantom phone vibrations: your body is telling you exactly how deep the dependency runs.
 - In TCM's organ clock, the Gallbladder meridian (11 p.m.–1 a.m.) processes the day's decisions. Your worst withdrawal pangs at night are not insomnia — they're your Gallbladder meridian working overtime to clear the day's dopamine debt.
 - Hexagram 23, Bo (Stripping Away): Layer by layer, what isn't you is falling off. Don't grab at the peeling layers. Let them go and see what's underneath.
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Day 3: Boredom Is a Door

Today's Scripture

✦ **Thirty spokes converge upon a single hub — it is the empty space that makes the wheel useful. Shape clay into a vessel — it is the hollow within that makes it useful. Cut doors and windows for a room — it is the empty space that makes it useful. Therefore, what is there brings advantage, but what is not there brings usefulness.**

✦ — *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 11

Ding Long's commentary:

This is one of Laozi's most brilliant passages. Thirty spokes radiate from a wheel hub — the hub is empty at its center, and that's why the wheel can turn. Mold clay into a pot — the pot is hollow inside, and that's what lets it hold things. Chisel out doors and windows to build a house — the house is open space within, and that's what makes it livable. "What is there" gives you convenience; "what is not there" gives you actual function.

Every day of your life up until now, you've been filling "what is there." Today, I'm going to ask you to do something counterintuitive: embrace "what is not there." Embrace boredom. Two hours. You're not allowed to fill them with anything.

Today's Challenge

Two hours of complete, unadulterated boredom — you may not fill the space.

The rules are simple: screens remain off. Set aside two hours and sit somewhere — by a window, on a balcony, on a park bench, or right on your living room floor. No reading. No music. No writing. No doing anything. You're allowed tea. That's it.

Don't use your phone as a timer — use an alarm clock, or have someone keep time for you. Two hours.

I know what you're thinking right now: "Two hours doing nothing? I'll go insane."

You won't go insane. But the first ten seconds, you'll want to run.

My experience:

I once asked a friend in finance to try this exercise. He lasted ten seconds before standing up to grab a broom — "Can I at least sweep the floor?" — I said no. He sat back down and started bouncing his leg. Ten minutes later, he was tapping his fingers against his knee. Half an hour in, the leg-bouncing stopped. Forty-five minutes in, he later told me: "I just remembered digging for earthworms in the backyard as a kid. I haven't thought about that in twenty years."

Boredom is a door. You've been stuffing information against it to keep it shut. Today, open the door and see what walks in on its own.

Body Awareness

For the two-hour window you choose today, I suggest:

Wu hour (11:00–13:00): The Heart meridian is on duty.

The wu hour is when yang energy peaks for the day, and the Heart meridian takes the watch. What do modern people do during their lunch break? They scroll through their phones — which is the equivalent of stomping on the gas pedal of a heart that's already racing. Today, if you sit in stillness during the wu hour, do you know what you're actually doing? You're nourishing yin at the very moment yang is at its height — giving the heart a calm space precisely when it's most active. This is one of the most heart-nourishing things you can do.

If, while sitting still, your heart seems to beat faster — your heart isn't malfunctioning. It's just that the noise used to drown it out, and now you can finally hear it.

Write this down: after the sitting period ended, how did your mood compare to before it began?

Hexagram Journal

Today's Hexagram: ☵ Fu — Return

The Fu hexagram: a single yang line rising from the very bottom, with five yin lines above it. The Yi Jing says: "Returning on its path, in seven days it comes back — this is the movement of Heaven."

Ding Long's commentary: Fu is one of the most hopeful hexagrams in the entire Yi Jing. At the deepest bottom, a single yang energy has just sprouted. "In seven days it comes back" — seven days is a full cycle, and today, the third day of your retreat, yang energy is beginning to rise again. Fu's imagery is the first hint of spring after winter, the first thread of light after deep night. That subtle thought that surfaced during your boredom — the one you haven't had in years — that is Fu.

Three self-inquiries:

During the boredom, what thoughts, memories, or feelings surfaced on their own? Even if they only flickered through.

"What is there" and "what is not there" — in my life, how much of "what is there" is actually blocking "what is not there" from doing its work?

Was there a moment today when boredom somehow turned into... something comfortable?

Evening Review

- The hardest part today: ____
- The most surprising thing: ____
- Tomorrow I will: ____

Key Takeaways

- Laozi's most practical teaching: "Profit comes from what is there; usefulness from what is not." You've been filling every empty space with content. Today you discover that the empty space IS the point.
 - Boredom is not a problem to solve — it's a door. Behind it are thoughts, memories, and ideas that have been waiting decades for a gap in the noise.
 - Hexagram 24, Fu (Return): "Seven days come and return — this is the movement of Heaven." Day 3 is the turning point. The first yang energy rises from below. That subtle thought you hadn't had in years? That's Fu.
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Day 4: Your True Rhythm

Today's Scripture

••Humans model themselves on the Earth. The Earth models itself on Heaven. Heaven models itself on the Dao. And the Dao models itself on what is naturally so.••

— *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 25

Ding Long's commentary:

Laozi uses four instances of the word "model" (fa) to draw a roadmap. Humans model themselves on the Earth — the Earth is grounded, rhythmic, unhurried. The Earth models itself on Heaven — Heaven has day and night, the four seasons, an inherent cadence. Heaven models itself on the Dao — the Dao is the underlying logic by which all things operate. And the Dao models itself on ziran — "what is naturally so," the way things are when left to themselves.

Today, what you're going to do is skip the rhythm your phone imposes on you and go straight back to the rhythm of the Earth, the rhythm of Heaven — back to the rhythm your own body was born with.

Today's Challenge

Live one full day following the ziwu liuzhu organ-meridian clock.

Today, you may look at a screen — but only once. Open it in the morning for ten minutes to handle urgent messages, then turn it off. Today's core task isn't about the screen. It's about the clock.

Here is your body's actual timetable:

Two-Hour Period	Time	Meridian	What You Should Be Doing
Mao hour	05:00–07:00	Large Intestine	Wake up, eliminate, drink warm water
Chen hour	07:00–09:00	Stomach	Eat breakfast — stomach qi peaks here
Si hour	09:00–11:00	Spleen	Work, study — the Spleen governs thought; your mind is sharpest
Wu hour	11:00–13:00	Heart	Eat lunch, then rest/nap for 15–30 minutes
Wei hour	13:00–15:00	Small Intestine	Handle minor tasks and details
Shen hour	15:00–17:00	Bladder	Second productivity peak — ideal for output
You hour	17:00–19:00	Kidney	Wind down, relax — the body's daily "shutdown button"
Xu hour	19:00–21:00	Pericardium	Walk, chat, no complex thinking

Hai hour | 21:00–23:00 | Triple Burner | Prepare for sleep
Zi hour | 23:00–01:00 | Gallbladder | Must be asleep
Chou hour | 01:00–03:00 | Liver | Deep sleep — liver stores blood and detoxifies
Yin hour | 03:00–05:00 | Lung | Deep sleep — lungs connect to all vessels

You don't need to execute this perfectly today. But at a minimum, hit these three: wake during the mao hour (around 6 a.m.), eat breakfast during the chen hour, and be asleep by the hai hour (around 10 p.m.).

A case from my practice:

People often ask me, "Are Daoist priests just naturally able to wake up at 6 a.m.?" No. I used to hit snooze seven times too. But I eventually discovered a secret — it wasn't that I couldn't wake up. It was that I'd be on my phone too late the night before. The Large Intestine meridian's "wake-up call" comes reliably between 5 and 7 a.m. The problem is that you sabotaged your Gallbladder and Liver meridians the night before. They didn't finish their work, so you wake up exhausted.

The average person lives by their phone's clock: scroll until 1 a.m., get blasted awake by an alarm at 8, skip breakfast, finally start functioning around 10. A Daoist priest lives by the organ clock: asleep by the hai hour, naturally awake by the mao hour, actually hungry at the chen hour. The difference isn't willpower. The difference is whose clock you're listening to.

Body Awareness

Today, you've now seen the full Neijing clock. I want you to pay special attention to the felt difference between two specific periods:

- ****You hour (17:00–19:00)**:** The Kidney meridian is on duty. This is when the day should be "gathering inward." If your normal habit is to still be working or scrolling at eight or nine at night — today, try winding down during the you hour and feel what signals your Kidney meridian sends you during this window. You might feel a faint soreness in your lower back — that's your kidneys saying, "I need to rest."
- ****Hai hour (21:00–23:00)**:** The Triple Burner meridian is on duty. The Triple Burner regulates the water pathways and orchestrates the body's entire qi dynamic. Getting ready for sleep during the hai hour allows the Triple Burner to complete its final integration of the day. If you're used to staring at a screen during this window, the Triple Burner's work gets interrupted.

Write this down: which two-hour period felt the most natural today? Which felt the most awkward?

Hexagram Journal

Today's Hexagram: ☵ Jie — Limitation

The Jie hexagram: water above a lake. The Yi Jing says: "Limitation brings success. But bitter limitation cannot endure."

Ding Long's commentary: Jie is about measure and moderation. Water above a lake — the lake can hold the water, but too much water and the banks burst. Jie tells you: only within limits is there freedom. But notice the second half of the hexagram statement — "bitter limitation cannot endure." A restriction that's too harsh can't be sustained. Today, you're living by the organ-meridian clock. If you can't do it perfectly, don't beat yourself up. Jie is a rhythm, not a military order. Find your rhythm — don't impose one by force.

Three self-inquiries:

What's the biggest gap between my usual daily rhythm and the organ-meridian clock I followed today?

Which moment felt most natural — as if my body had always wanted to do that thing at that time?
What does "limitation" mean to me? Is it a shackle — or a kind of protection I'd forgotten I needed?

Evening Review

- The hardest part today: ____
- The most surprising thing: ____
- Tomorrow I will: ____

Key Takeaways

- Your body already has a clock — the organ-meridian clock (*ziwu liuzhu*). 6 a.m. isn't "discipline," it's your Large Intestine meridian knocking. The reason you're exhausted in the morning isn't that you're lazy — it's that you kept your Liver and Gallbladder meridians working overtime the night before.
 - Hexagram 60, Jie (Limitation): Boundaries aren't prisons. The lake that has banks can hold water. The life that has rhythm can hold energy.
 - Today's experiment: live one day by your body's clock instead of your phone's clock. Just three non-negotiables: wake at the mao hour (5–7 a.m.), eat breakfast at the chen hour (7–9 a.m.), asleep by the hai hour (9–11 p.m.).
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Day 5: What Truly Matters

Today's Scripture

****See the plain and embrace the uncarved block. Reduce self-interest and lessen desire.****
— *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 19

Ding Long's commentary:

Four actions — "See the plain": look upon things in their original, undyed quality, the unbleached white before the color is added. "Embrace the uncarved block": hold fast to the raw wood before it's been carved into something else. "Reduce self-interest": shrink that "me" that's constantly saying I want. "Lessen desire": let desire become less — not eliminate it, just lessen it.

Laozi never said "annihilate self-interest and extinguish desire." A Daoist can have desires too — but they should be genuine desires, not ones implanted by a screen. Today we're going to sort: in all that your screen shows you, what is "plain silk and the uncarved block," and what is dye painted on top?

Today's Challenge

Make two lists.

Take out paper and pen. Draw two columns. Left column heading: Things I genuinely need a screen to do. Right column heading: Things I can do without a screen.

The rules:

- ****Left column****: Only write down what is truly necessary — things required for work, things needed to maintain important relationships, essential life functions (like navigation, paying bills). After you finish, go back line by line and ask yourself: "Does this *really* require a screen? Or is it just more convenient with

h one?"

- ****Right column****: Write down as many things as you can — things you used to do with a screen that actually require no screen at all. Examples: reading (paper books), journaling (pen and paper), checking the time (a watch), relaxing (a walk), catching up with friends (meet in person or call instead of texting).

Finally, do one thing: count how many items are in the left column and how many are in the right.

A case from my practice:

I once guided an entrepreneur through this exercise. His first pass: 17 items in the left column, 3 in the right. I said, take another look at the left column — does "reading industry news" truly require a screen? Aren't there print publications? Does "capturing ideas" truly require a screen? Isn't there something called a no tebook? After the rewrite, the left column was down to 4 items and the right column had grown to 31.

He stared at the paper for a long time, then said: "Eighty percent of my screen time was just providing cover for those four things."

What's your ratio? Write it down.

Body Awareness

There's a line from the Nei Jing that speaks directly to today's exercise:

****"Eat and drink with moderation. Rise and rest with regularity. Do not labor recklessly."****

"Eat and drink with moderation" — it's not just about food and drink. Information is a form of consumption too. Some of the information you ingest every day nourishes you; some of it damages the Spleen. The Spleen governs thought — overthinking and excessive, chaotic information injure the Spleen most of all. Have you ever noticed that after a long scroll session, you suddenly want to eat something? That's not hunger. That's your Spleen crying for help — it's saying: the information you've shoved into me is too much, and I need physical food to "weigh it down."

Addiction to a particular flavor injures the corresponding organ — and addiction to a particular kind of content does the same. Every piece of content the algorithm feeds you reinforces your biases. Today, when you make these two lists, what you're really doing is a nutritional analysis of your "information diet."

Hexagram Journal

Today's Hexagram: ☶ Sun — Decrease

The Sun hexagram: a mountain above a lake. The Yi Jing says: "Decrease what is below to increase what is above. The way moves upward."

Ding Long's commentary: The meaning of Sun is refreshingly straightforward — reduce what's below to augment what's above. When you cut low-quality information intake, your spirit (shen) and your clarity of judgment actually grow. Decrease is not loss. Decrease is the reallocation of resources. "Decrease what is below to increase what is above" — you redirect the energy and time you used to waste on scrolling toward the things that genuinely matter. That "above" might be your family, your body, that thing you've always wanted to do but never felt you had time for.

Three self-inquiries:

How many items in my left column (screen-required) could I realistically delete or replace?

In my right column (no screen needed), which three things do I most want to bring back into my life first

?

"Reduce self-interest and lessen desire" — if what gets reduced is the "me" that lives inside my phone, who is the "me" that remains?

Evening Review

- The hardest part today: ____
- The most surprising thing: ____
- Tomorrow I will: ____

Key Takeaways

- Make two lists: what genuinely requires a screen, and what doesn't. Most people find 80% of their screen time sits beneath a handful of actual necessities.
 - In TCM, information is a form of "food." Overconsumption of junk information injures the Spleen, just as overeating junk food does. Your post-doomscrolling snack craving? That's your Spleen calling for help.
 - Hexagram 41, Sun (Decrease): Decrease what's below to increase what's above. Cut the low-quality input and watch your clarity rise.
-

Day 6: Returning with Awareness

Today's Scripture

****The Dao constantly does nothing — and yet nothing is left undone.****
— *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 37

Ding Long's commentary:

This might be the single most misunderstood line in the entire Dao De Jing. Wu wei — "doing nothing" — does not mean being passive or idle. It means not acting against the natural grain of things, not forcing. And "nothing is left undone" — when you stop forcing, there is paradoxically nothing you cannot accomplish.

Over the past five days, you've been practicing subtraction. Today, you're going to carry those five days of awareness with you and open your phone again. But you are not going back to the way things were. You're going to use it with wu wei, rather than be used by it.

Today's Challenge

Open your phone again — but before you do, write five rules.

Not rules about "what's forbidden." Rules about "what's worth looking at."

Take an index card or a sticky note. Write down five of your own Principles for Digital Use. Stick it to the back of your phone — or directly onto your phone case. Every time you pick up your phone, you see this card first.

Five example rules (adapt them to your own needs):

- **Before opening the phone, ask: what am I here to do? Do it, then put it down.****
- **One thing at a time — no replying to messages while watching videos.****

****After 9 p.m., the phone does not enter the bedroom.****

****At least one full day per week with zero social media.****

****Every 45 minutes of screen time, stand up and walk for 5 minutes — your body is more than just your eyes.****

This is not "no short videos allowed." The focus of these rules isn't prohibition — it's choice. "Prohibition" demands willpower, and willpower runs out. "Choice" only requires awareness, and awareness doesn't deplete — you've been training it for the past five days.

My own rules:

Here's what I personally keep taped to my phone: ① Before opening, be clear — I'm here to send a message. Send it, then leave. ② Never scroll lying down — the ancients said, "Do not speak while reclining." Lying down with a phone injures you on both fronts. ③ Any content that triggers comparison — the moment I recognize it, I swipe away.

That third one is the most important. Comparison is the assembly line of anxiety. And social media is the conveyor belt feeding the whole factory.

Body Awareness

Today, you're using your eyes again. The Nei Jing has a line about this:

****"Prolonged gazing injures the blood."****

Not the eyes. The blood. The liver stores blood, and the eyes receive blood and thus can see. The longer you stare at a screen, the more blood you deplete. This is why, after a long screen session, it's not just your eyes that are tired — your whole body is tired. What you've spent isn't physical energy. It's blood.

So today's body-awareness task is simple: every time you pick up your phone, first check in with three parts of your body — eyes, shoulders, breath.

- Are your eyes relaxed or tense?
- Have your shoulders crept up toward your ears? (Most people's shoulders automatically lift the moment they look at a screen.)
- Is your breath deep or shallow?

You don't need to change anything. Just notice. The moment you notice, your body adjusts on its own. This is your body's own "the Dao constantly does nothing, and yet nothing is left undone."

Hexagram Journal

Today's Hexagram: ☶ Qian — Humility

The Qian hexagram: a mountain within the earth. The Yi Jing says: "Humility brings success. The noble person carries things through to completion."

Ding Long's commentary: Qian is the only hexagram in the entire sixty-four where all six lines are auspicious. A mountain within the earth — something as massive as a mountain, concealed beneath the ground. That is humility. Today, as you return to your screen with awareness, this is exactly the attitude you need: humility toward your own desires. Knowing you are not superhuman, knowing you won't transform completely in one attempt. Humility isn't low self-esteem — it's clarity about where you stand. You know what you're susceptible to. You don't posture and pretend otherwise. So you set rules — and that is genuine humility.

ity.

Three self-inquiries:

Of the five rules I wrote, which one is the most honest — not the most "impressive," but the one I genuinely need?

"Humility" — in relation to my phone, what should I be humble about? (Hint: it's not about being humble toward the phone. It's about being humble toward a certain pattern of my own.)

If I broke one of my rules today, how will I treat myself? — With self-blame, or with curiosity: "What just happened there?"

Evening Review

- The hardest part today: ____
- The most surprising thing: ____
- Tomorrow I will: ____

Key Takeaways

- Rules that say "I choose to" work infinitely better than rules that say "I forbid myself to." Willpower depletes. Awareness — which you've been training for five days — doesn't.
 - Hexagram 15, Qian (Humility): The only hexagram where all six lines are auspicious. The mountain hidden within the earth. True humility with technology isn't self-deprivation — it's knowing your patterns and designing around them.
 - Before every screen pickup today, check three body points: eyes, shoulders, breath. Don't change anything. Just notice. The body's own **wu wei** will do the rest.
-

Day 7: Return

Today's Scripture

****Return is the movement of the Dao.****
— **Dao De Jing**, Chapter 40

Ding Long's commentary:

Just five words, and yet this is the most essential law of motion in the entire Dao De Jing. The character fan (反) carries two meanings: one is return — all things eventually return to their source. The other is reversal — when something develops to its extreme, it turns toward its opposite.

Your seven-day experiment in the digital Dao has reached its final day. I am not going to give you a "happily ever after" ending. I can't. Next week, you might binge-scroll again. But you will know one thing: you know the way back. Fan — you can return. You can return from clamor to quiet, from scattered to focused. This ability to come back is far more real than "never leaving in the first place."

Today's Challenge

Write your own Ten Principles of the Digital Dao.

Everything from the past six days now settles into today. Write ten principles that are your own — not min

e, not the Dao De Jing's, but yours. Principles you have genuinely experienced over these seven days, principles you believe you can sustain, principles you're willing to keep practicing for the next month.

Ten is just a reference number. Write eight if that's right. Write twelve. The key is this: behind every principle, there should be a sentence that begins, "Because I experienced it."

Examples (yours should be completely different):

The phone doesn't enter the bedroom — because on Day 1, I discovered that when the first thing I do upon waking isn't reaching for my phone, the whole day is different.

One "zero-screen day" every week — because the quiet of Day 1 is something I genuinely want to taste again, regularly.

When I'm bored, I don't fill the space — because those two hours on Day 3 were more nourishing than an entire day of information.

Start preparing for sleep by 9:30 p.m. — because on Day 4, I tested it. Falling asleep at the hai hour versus the zi hour — the difference the next morning is like you're two different people.

...

This is not a set of precepts to bind you. This is a protective order you are issuing on your own behalf. Protecting your attention, your liver blood, your quiet, and those thoughts that only get a chance to surface in the space of boredom.

Body Awareness

The Nei Jing leaves you with one final line —

***"Tranquil and empty, genuine qi follows; the spirit is held within — how could illness enter?"**

Ding Long's commentary: This isn't telling you to become an emotionless person. "Tranquil and empty" — the heart-mind is calm, desires are insubstantial. "Genuine qi follows" — that real, authentic energy inside your body begins to move in step with your own rhythm. "The spirit is held within" — your attention and awareness are kept inside your own body, rather than scattered across every screen. "How could illness enter?" — from where, exactly, would illness come?

What you've been doing these seven days is precisely these four steps. You turned off the screens — the spirit stopped leaking outward. You felt the withdrawal — genuine qi began to rediscover its rhythm. You embraced boredom — the soil of tranquility was loosened. You lived by the organ clock — holding the spirit within now has a concrete timetable.

Today, there's no special awareness task. Just this: tonight, before you fall asleep, lie in bed and feel your body. Not with your thinking mind — with your body's own felt sense. Slowly scan from your feet to the top of your head. Compared to the body you inhabited seven days ago — has anything changed?

Hexagram Journal

Today's Hexagram: ☲ Weiji — Before Completion

The Weiji hexagram: fire above water. The Yi Jing says: "Fire above water: Before Completion. The noble person carefully discerns things and finds their proper place."

Ding Long's commentary: Weiji is the very last hexagram of the sixty-four. It's telling you a deep truth: nothing is ever "complete." Detox is never complete. Practice has no finish line. The path you started seven days ago does not end today. Weiji — fire above water, fire and water not yet interacting — it looks chaotic,

but the Yi Jing placed this hexagram at the very end for a reason: precisely because it is never complete, it is perpetually becoming. Precisely because there is no endpoint, every step is genuinely the path.

You don't have to be a perfect digital hermit. You just need to know what "stillness" feels like now. With that as your compass, no matter how far you drift, you can always find your way back.

Three self-inquiries:

What state was I in seven days ago? What state am I in today? — Not judging good or bad, just describing objectively.

Over these seven days, was there a moment when I thought, "Yes — this. This is the feeling." What was that moment?

"Weiji" — this path has no endpoint. Am I willing to continue? If yes, what is my next step?

Evening Review

- The hardest part today: ____
- The most surprising thing: ____
- Tomorrow I will: ____

Key Takeaways

- "Return is the movement of the Dao" (*fan zhe dao zhi dong*). You will drift. You will binge again. But now you know the way back. That knowing is worth more than perfect abstinence.
 - Hexagram 64, Weiji (Before Completion): The final hexagram of the *I Ching* — and it's one of incompleteness. The work is never done. That's not a failure. That's the nature of being alive.
 - "Tranquil emptiness, genuine qi follows; spirit held within, how could illness enter?" Seven days ago you read these words. Today you've lived them — at least enough to know what they feel like.
-

Conclusion: You Don't Need to Become a Daoist Priest. You Just Need to Remember the Way Back.

I've been a Daoist priest for twenty-five years. The single most important thing I've learned in those twenty-five years is this: practice is not arrival. It is return.

You don't need to throw away your phone. You don't need to move to a remote mountain. You don't need to wake up at 4 a.m. to meditate. You only need to remember one thing: your body has its own clock. Your spirit has its own rhythm. Your stillness doesn't need anything to "fill" it.

Over these seven days, you gave your liver meridian a chance to breathe. You freed your spirit from being torn apart by over a hundred notifications a day. You found things in boredom that had been buried for a long time. You lived a full day on your body's original timetable — and that may be closer to the Dao than anything you've done in the past year.

▮ The Dao is not far from people. If what people take to be the Dao is far from people, it cannot be the Dao.

The Dao has never left you. It's that little rectangular block in your hand that made you feel like you were far away from it.

Next time you binge-scroll — and you will, that's guaranteed — don't rush to curse yourself out. Stop. Do

a Gen. Take one deep breath. And then ask yourself that question:
Before I reached for it — what was my state like in the first place?
You know the answer. You already know.

Ding Long
The Way Among the Clouds