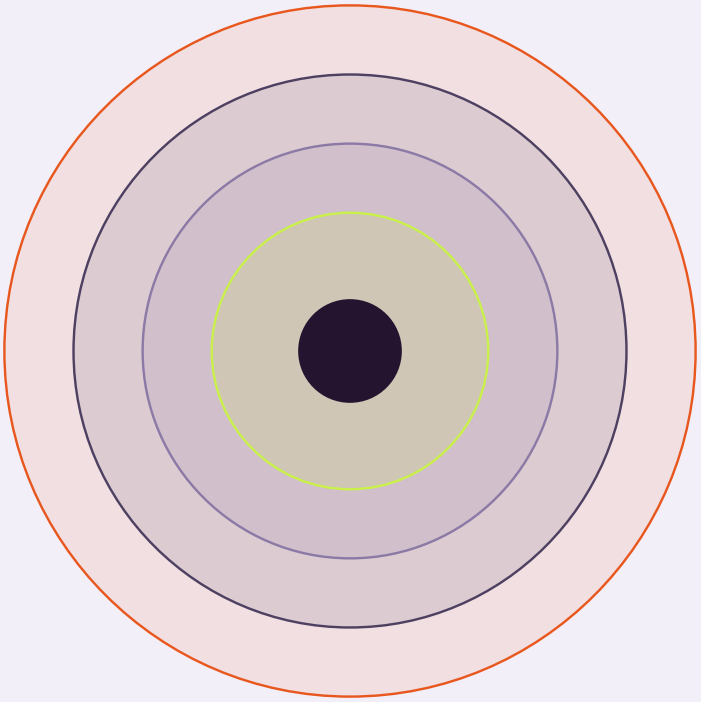


The Book of Awakening

A reading of the book by Mark Nepo (2000)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of The Book of Awakening, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Three hundred and sixty-five entries, one for each day, written by a poet who had a rib removed and a rare cancer survived and came out the other side unable to hurry. Each entry is a short quote, a shorter reflection, and one small thing to actually do. Its subtitle is the whole argument: having the life you want by being present to the life you have.

Below are the 8 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Having the life you want by being present to the life you have. The subtitle is the entire argument, and it takes most people about a decade to stop hearing it as a consolation prize.

Read it as a swap rather than a compromise. Nepo is not saying to want less. He is saying the wanting is aimed at a life that, examined at close enough range, is already partly here — and that presence is the instrument that brings it into range.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

There are 365 entries because waking up is not an event you can schedule. It is something you do again tomorrow.

The form is the teaching. A book of days refuses to be finished, refuses to be summarised, and gives you nothing you can complete — which is exactly the objection people raise and exactly the point.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

We put on invisible gloves against the world and then cannot understand why so little of it reaches us.

One of the most quoted passages in the book, and Nepo's own words are better than any paraphrase: the daily work is to unglove ourselves "so that the doorknob feels cold and the car handle feels wet and the kiss goodbye feels like the lips of another being, soft and unrepeatable."

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Nothing coming toward you is sharp. Speed is what sharpens it.

Nepo puts it as a physics problem: "Sometimes I move so fast it hurts. Though the things coming at me are not moving at all... Running into any point makes it a knife." The things were soft and inviting. You arrived at them at velocity.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

He was wheeled toward surgery frightened out of his wits, and what he found at the edge was not courage but something closer to dancing.

Written around the rib removal and the rare lymphoma that produced this book. His account — "Death pushed me to the edge. Nowhere to back off... I danced with abandon in his face. I never danced as free. And Death backed off, the way dark backs off a sudden burst of flame." It is the least serene passage in the book and the one people carry.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Every entry ends with something to do, and it is always small enough to do today.

Sit with one object. Breathe and think of one person you have not forgiven. Say the sentence out loud. The practices are almost embarrassingly modest, which is the only reason anyone ever performs them.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Most of what has to happen is removal. You are not being assembled into something better; you are being uncovered.

Nepo's recurring image is erosion — water on stone, wind on rock. It reframes the whole self-improvement instinct: the work is not acquiring a practice, a discipline or a personality, it is wearing away what has been laid over what was already there.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Presence is not a mood you achieve. It is the width of your attention, and it can only be widened one object at a time.

Which is why the book never asks for an hour. It asks for one doorknob, one mouthful, one face — on the theory that width is built the way a path is worn, by going the same way repeatedly and not by deciding to.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Read one entry a day and stop there
- [ ] Start on today's date, not on January 1st
- [ ] Put it where the day already pauses
- [ ] Do the practice, not only the reading
- [ ] Write in the margins and date what you write

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Unglove one ordinary object a day
- ◯ Slow at the exact moment you speed up
- ◯ Go back to the entry that irritated you

30 days · Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Read one entry a day and stop there

It is a very readable book and reading forty entries in an afternoon is the standard way to get nothing from it.

The form is the dose. One page, then close it, even when you would rather not.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Start on today's date, not on January 1st

The entries are dated and people wait for the year to turn, which is nine months of not starting.

Open it at today. The book was built to be entered in the middle, which is where every life is.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Put it where the day already pauses

Beside the kettle, on the bedside table, in the bag you carry to work.

A daily book only survives if it is physically inside an existing gap. Willpower will not carry a habit that has nowhere to happen.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Do the practice, not only the reading

The italic paragraph at the bottom of each entry is the entry.

The passage above it is a preamble. Nearly everybody reads the beautiful part, skips the instruction, and then finds the book pleasant and forgettable.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Write in the margins and date what you write

Three words is enough.

A year later the margins are the more useful book, because they show you which entries you needed twice and what was happening the first time you needed them.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Unglove one ordinary object a day

The mug, the door handle, the shirt cuff, the steering wheel.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Slow at the exact moment you speed up

The lurch that comes when you are late, behind, or being asked something difficult.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Go back to the entry that irritated you

Some pages will read as sentimental or too easily won.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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30						

December 2026

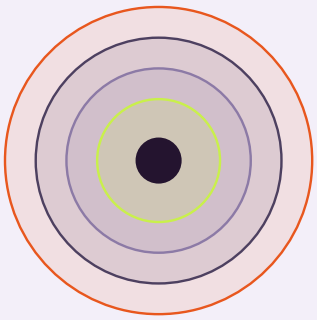
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Now there's nothing left, but to keep dancing.

MARK NEPO