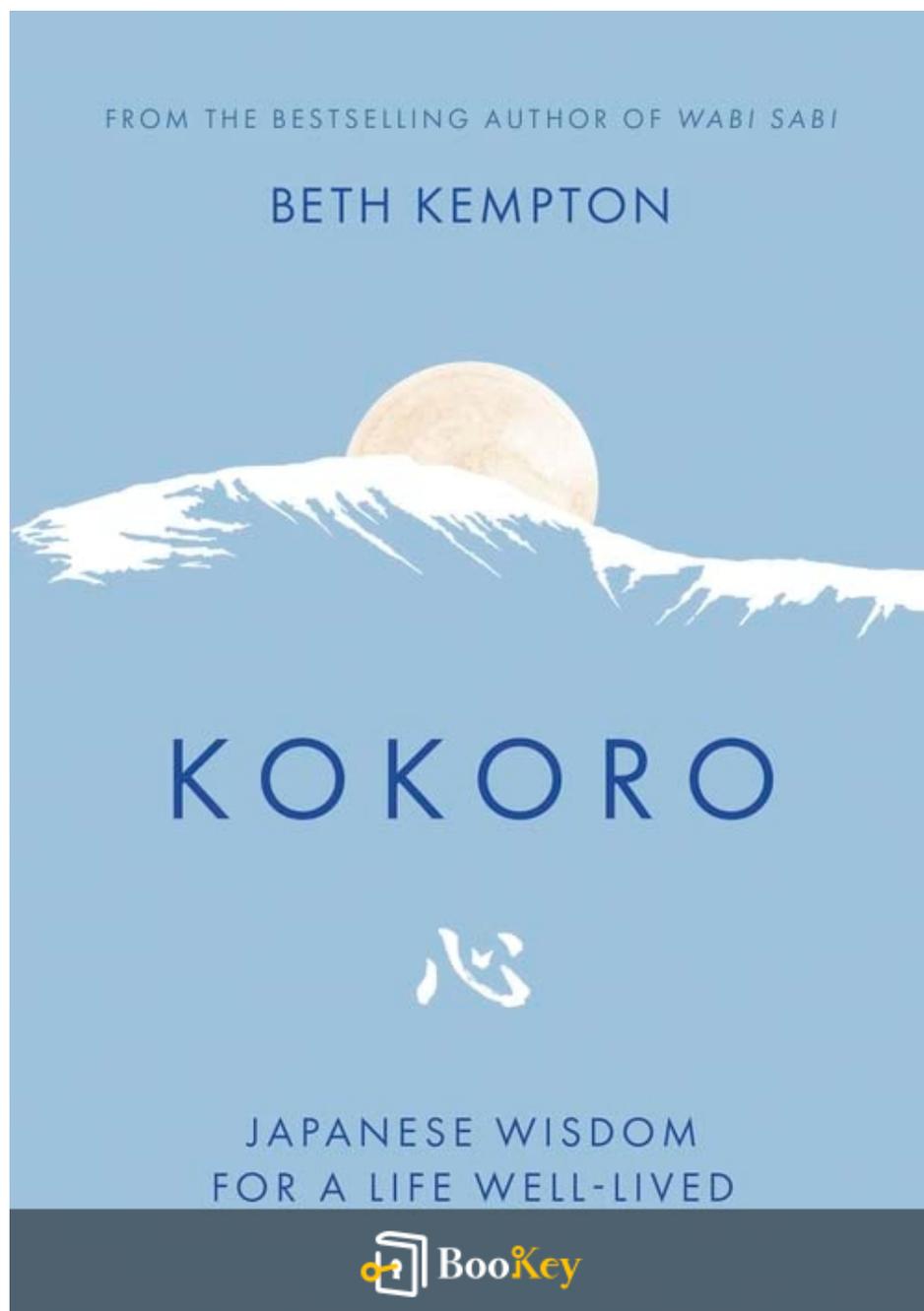


Kokoro PDF (Limited Copy)

Beth Kempton



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Kokoro Summary

Embrace Stillness and Contentment in Life's Uncertainty.

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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About the book

In "Kokoro," Beth Kempton offers readers a profound exploration of the intersection between stillness and happiness in the fast-paced modern world. The title itself, meaning "heart-mind," epitomizes the book's central theme: the harmony of emotional and intellectual existence. Drawing from a rich wellspring of Japanese literature, culture, and philosophy that spans over a millennium, Kempton invites readers to transcend the superficial aspects of customary tourism and delve deeper into the essence of Japan and its people.

The narrative unfolds through an intricate tapestry woven with timeless poetry and Zen teachings, leading into the martial arts philosophy, which emphasizes discipline, focus, and the pursuit of inner peace. By integrating inspiring stories of contemporary pioneers—individuals who embody the principles of Japanese wisdom—Kempton redefines the concept of happiness. She challenges conventional notions and encourages a fresh viewpoint on living life to the fullest.

As readers navigate the chapters, they are guided through practical meditations and reflections that promote the cultivation of presence, awareness, and joy. These exercises serve as tools to help readers transcend common human experiences of fear and regret. With each turn of the page, Kempton fosters a growing sense of wonder and purpose, advocating for the appreciation of everyday moments. The ultimate goal of "Kokoro" is not

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merely to enhance the present but to enrich one's entire life, creating a legacy of fulfillment and tranquility that resonates beyond the immediate.

Thus, "Kokoro" stands as a beautifully crafted meditation that encourages individuals to embrace a deeper, more meaningful existence, aligning their heart and mind while navigating the complexities of life. By embodying its teachings, readers are inspired to live not just for today, but for a life imbued with significance and joy.

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About the author

In her latest work, Beth Kempton, a celebrated Japanologist and bestselling author, draws upon her extensive knowledge of Japanese culture to offer readers transformative insights into living a fulfilling life. With her background as a scholar of Japan, holding two degrees in the language, and her immersion in traditional practices such as papermaking and the tea ceremony, Kempton weaves profound understanding into her writing.

The chapters of “Kokoro: Japanese Wisdom for a Life Well-Lived” present a series of reflections that connect Japanese philosophies with everyday practices to encourage a balanced and meaningful existence. Kempton begins by introducing the concept of **Kokoro**, a Japanese word that encompasses the heart, mind, and spirit, as she reveals how this integration can lead to greater harmony in life.

Each chapter delves into specific themes such as mindfulness drawn from Zen practices, the beauty of impermanence highlighted by the Japanese aesthetic of **Wabi-Sabi**, and the importance of community through cultural rituals. Kempton’s insight into the **Ikigai** concept—finding joy in living through one’s passions and contributions—serves as a guiding principle throughout her narrative, urging readers to explore their own reasons for being.

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She also reflects on her personal experiences and relationships, illustrating how Japanese wisdom has informed her identity as a mother and mentor. By sharing stories from her life in Devon, where she embraces a slow and mindful lifestyle, Kempton emphasizes the significance of appreciating the mundane and finding joy beyond material success.

As readers journey through her work, they are not only introduced to unfamiliar traditions but are also invited to apply these valuable lessons to enhance their spiritual well-being and everyday lives. Kempton's blend of personal narrative with cultural exploration creates a rich tapestry, making the teachings accessible and relatable without sacrificing their depth.

Throughout "Kokoro," Beth Kempton encapsulates the essence of living well, encouraging her audience to engage with both Japanese philosophy and their inner selves to cultivate a life imbued with purpose, tranquility, and joy.

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Chapter 1 Summary: 1. Life: The scroll unravels

Chapter 1 Summary: Life - The Scroll Unravels

In a quaint cottage along England's picturesque south coast, the narrator finds a sense of tranquility in the mundane task of ironing while watching the televised funeral of Queen Elizabeth II. The somber atmosphere is intensified by the recent passing of their friend Lisa, which evokes a profound awareness of life's fragility. This unexpected loss triggers deep reflections on mortality and the narrator's own life choices, marking the onset of a midlife crisis.

In search of clarity and wisdom, the narrator embarks on a transformative journey to Hagurosan, a sacred mountain in Japan revered for its spiritual significance. Here, they seek enlightenment through the teachings of Master Hayasaka, a yamabushi, who embodies the principles of spiritual practice that emphasizes harmony with nature and acceptance of life's inherent uncertainty. Amidst the tranquility of the mountain, the narrator confronts feelings of unfinished business and societal pressures, wrestling with their desire for deeper meaning and a lasting legacy.

As the story unfolds, the narrator is drawn into a tapestry of significant memories and existential questions, stimulated by their growing awareness

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of mortality. This introspective journey exposes a yearning for a fulfilling life, contrasting sharply with the distractions of contemporary existence. The serene interactions with the mountain cultivate an understanding that embracing the unknown and life's unpredictability may ultimately lead to personal fulfillment and a more impactful legacy.

The chapter concludes with poignant prompts that encourage readers to reflect on their own life priorities, the tensions they face, and the unanswered questions that linger in their hearts. This invitation to contemplate one's journey promotes a deeper understanding of what it means to live purposefully amidst life's uncertainties.

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Chapter 2 Summary: 2. Heart-mindfulness: Just arranging flowers

Chapter 2 Summary: Heart-Mindfulness and Kokoro

In this chapter, the narrator embarks on a reflective journey up Mount Haguro, where she encounters stone carvings that symbolize her search for **kokoro**—a profound Japanese concept intertwining heart, mind, spirit, and soul. As she navigates her midlife challenges, understanding **kokoro** becomes crucial for her personal development and emotional well-being.

Kokoro, a term steeped in ancient Japanese tradition, transcends the physical heart, embodying spiritual depth, emotional intelligence, and creativity. It serves as a guiding compass in life, allowing individuals to navigate relationships and appreciate beauty with heightened sensitivity. The exploration of **kokoro** encourages the narrator and readers alike to attune to their deeper selves, fostering emotional connections.

The chapter introduces the practice of **heart-mindfulness**, which emphasizes presence and authentic emotional expression. This practice suggests that joy should be experienced for its own merit, as illustrated by characters like Igo-sensei and Lisa, who live spontaneously and align themselves with the richness of the moment, free from rigid planning.

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Moreover, the narrative touches on how **kokoro** acts as both a voice and a mirror in the art of Noh theatre, revealing emotional truths that resonate with audiences. Discussions surrounding **kokoro** unveil varied interpretations, portraying it as a reflection of one's inner state or as a medium projecting the soul's brilliance into the world.

The narrator acknowledges her need to cleanse her **kokoro** to foster positivity, recognizing that this practice extends beyond personal benefit to impact her family as well. Inspired by nature and moments of stillness, she sees the value of integrating these practices into her daily life, emphasizing the role of **kokoro** in achieving authenticity and fulfillment.

To engage readers further, the chapter offers practical exercises and reflective questions. These prompts encourage individuals to identify areas of overthinking, explore ways to cleanse their **kokoro**, and recognize others in their lives embodying these heart-mindful practices. Ultimately, the message reinforces that a life well-lived is cultivated through the nurturing and embracing of **kokoro** and heart-mindfulness.

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Chapter 3 Summary: 3. Stillness: Where silence speaks

Chapter 3 Summary: Stillness Where Silence Speaks

Introduction to Stillness

The chapter opens with Mr. Tsuji, a taxi driver, quoting a poem whose verses resonate with themes of life's fleeting nature and serendipity.

As the narrator travels to RyMkan's hermitage, the narrator deepens their understanding of stillness.

Journey to Mount Kugami

During the drive, Mr. Tsuji recounts RyMkan's solitary life at the Temple, where he relied on the kindness of villagers to live a simple, yet profound life. RyMkan's journey illustrates the simultaneous joys and sorrows inherent in loneliness. As the narrator ascends Mount Kugami, they become increasingly aware of their yearning for stillness and a departure from the relentless chase of worldly pursuits.

Experiencing the Hermitage

Upon arriving at the hermitage, the narrator revels in the silence and natural

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beauty surrounding them. This serene environment prompts a reflection on the value of introspection and the importance of savoring life's simple joys, free from societal expectations.

Understanding 'Ma' & Spaciousness

The chapter introduces "ma," a Japanese term signifying the vital concept of space, both physical and emotional, that fosters creativity and self-reflection. This notion serves as a reminder that cultivating spaciousness in our lives allows for deeper connections and fresh insights.

Zen Retreat Experience

The narrator then visits a meditation retreat on Awaji Island, where they experience tranquility and the impact of thoughtfully designed spaces on one's ability to reflect. Engaging in yoga and meditation encourages the narrator to explore "kokoro," a term that encompasses a profound state of being, transcending mere mental calmness.

Connection to Nature and Time

A profound experience during a lunar eclipse compels the narrator to contemplate the ephemeral nature of time, emphasizing the need to cherish moments, relationships, and the beauty that life offers. This event reinforces

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the importance of being present.

Conclusion: Embracing Stillness

The chapter wraps up with a call to embrace stillness and attune oneself to the wisdom of the kokoro. It highlights that a fulfilling life is enriched by quiet moments of contemplation, encouraging deeper understanding and connection both with oneself and the world.

Kokoro Work: Stillness

Reflective questions prompt readers to consider what activities they would genuinely enjoy if they recognized their transience, fostering a greater appreciation for daily life and the integration of stillness into their routines.

Kokoro Wisdom

The final thoughts remind us that a life well-lived is defined by moments of stillness, harmonizing the inner voice of the kokoro through periods of peace and quietude.

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Chapter 4: 4. Time: A voice like thunder

Chapter 4: Time - A Voice Like Thunder

In this chapter, the author embarks on a journey to confront her midlife malaise by visiting Eihei-ji, an ancient Zen monastery revered for its tranquil setting and profound teachings. Guided by a friend's suggestion to seek stillness, she immerses herself in zazen meditation, which emphasizes being fully present rather than escaping life's realities.

While exploring Eihei-ji, the author experiences a striking sense of déjà vu connected to a recurring dream about Zen Master Eihei-ji of the Soto school of Zen. This dream triggers reflections on the interweaving of dreams and reality, as she recalls Dogen's teaching that enlightenment emerges from dedicated practice and being fully present in each moment.

Delving into Dogen's teachings, the author focuses on and introduces the radical concept of "being-time." This idea posits that time and existence are intrinsically linked, challenging the common perception of time as a simple, linear progression. She reflects on how contemporary life's rigid schedules often pull individuals away from the richness of the present, encouraging a reassessment of how time is perceived and managed.

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The author criticizes the notion of linear time management, which can create a prison of efficiency, prioritizing productivity over philosophy advocates for the recognition of each moment as a unique opportunity for realization, inviting a shift in perspective.

Interactions with a caretaker nun further illuminate the significance of living in the moment. The nun emphasizes that by embracing the present, individuals can harmonize past experiences with future aspirations, ultimately deepening one's understanding of life and spirituality.

Through her experiences, the author begins to adopt the practice of heart-mindfulness, illustrating the necessity of tuning into the present and acknowledging the interconnectedness of life's moments. As she prepares to return home, she resolves to carve out space in her life for reflection, distancing herself from the entrapment of constant busyness to gain clarity on her life's priorities. This resolution becomes pivotal as she anticipates significant personal challenges arising from family circumstances.

The chapter concludes with a prompt for readers to evaluate their own relationships with time, encouraging introspective contemplation on presence and priorities. The author emphasizes that a fulfilling life requires embracing each moment with intention, allowing the heart and mind to engage fully with the ebb and flow of existence.

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As winter gives way to spring, the author faces new challenges that highlight life's unpredictability, reinforcing the necessity of living with purpose and mindfulness amidst transition and change.

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Chapter 5 Summary: 5. Mortality: Here. Not here.

Chapter 5 Summary: Mortality

In this poignant chapter, the author reflects on her experiences surrounding the impending loss of her mother, who is battling terminal esophageal cancer. On her forty-sixth birthday, as she prepares for the upcoming funeral, she finds herself reminiscing about their final moments together. Her mother approaches her diagnosis with remarkable grace, prioritizing the present and focusing on what truly matters in their limited time.

During a bittersweet Mother's Day celebration, the family gathers to honor her mother with a mix of joy and sorrow. The author cherishes the heartwarming exchanges and laughter that fill the room, recognizing these moments as both a celebration of life and a tender farewell infused with profound love.

Amidst the diagnosis, the mother undergoes a remarkable transformation, confronting her reality not with despair, but with a spirit of acceptance. She begins to create meaningful memories, writing heartfelt letters to friends and loved ones, which serve as parting messages. The author admires her mother's bravery and the joy she radiates, serving as a source of inspiration even in the face of mortality.

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The narrative turns to the tender atmosphere of the hospice, where intimate moments between mother and daughter unfold. Here, the calm and bittersweet environment allows for the creation of beautiful memories that reinforce the significance of family love during these last days. The mother expresses her gratitude and embraces the connections that have defined her life.

As death looms closer, the author contemplates the essence of life and the inevitability of mortality. Conversations shared and experiences lived illuminate themes of love, loss, and the urgent need to cherish every moment. The author finds herself caught between sorrow and joy, deeply moved by her mother's enduring wisdom and resilience.

Following her mother's passing, the author grapples with profound grief, navigating the remnants of her absence while seeking solace in nature and the cherished memories they built together. The chapter culminates in a powerful reflection on the beauty and transience of life, urging readers to appreciate every fleeting moment and to recognize the everlasting significance of love and connection, even as they face inevitable goodbyes.

In a conclusion grounded in wisdom, the author underscores the inevitability of impermanence. She encourages readers to embrace their emotions and cultivate a life rich in love and meaningful relationships, all while

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acknowledging the transient nature of existence.

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Chapter 6 Summary: 6. Falling: Letting go. Being carried.

Chapter 6: Falling, Letting Go, Being Carried

In this poignant chapter, the author delves into the profound impact of loss and grief, particularly following the death of her mother. Despite a lifetime of encountering death, she admits a struggle to articulate her grief adequately. The void left by her mother's absence permeates her daily existence, starkly contrasting with her child's innocent belief that those we lose are never truly gone. This juxtaposition highlights the different ways in which people cope with death, often informed by their age and understanding of the world.

The complexity of grief is further explored through various Japanese terms that emphasize the integral role of the heart in the mourning process. The author recognizes that her mother's death not only marks a personal loss but also initiates a profound transformation in her identity and outlook on life. This tragedy compels her to contemplate the lessons that death imparts about living fully and authentically.

As she navigates her personal mourning journey, the author reflects on cultural traditions surrounding loss, integrating spiritual and emotional

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practices that arise from her experiences. These practices guide her toward abstract expressions of grief and lead to rich discussions about the nature of death, helping her process the intense emotions that accompany such a significant life change.

Amidst this emotional storm, the author confronts a powerful shedding of her former self, grappling with feelings of anger and rage. These intense emotions not only serve as a catalyst for deep reflection but also compel her to explore the transformative potential of grief—a reminder that through mourning, growth often occurs.

An unexpected encounter with a moth during a writing retreat serves as a pivotal moment for the author, unveiling spiritual insights about her mother's enduring presence in her life. This connection acts as a soothing reminder of her mother's spirit, fostering a sense of comfort in a time of upheaval.

Inspired by her mother's courage, the author contemplates embracing life's inevitable changes by engaging in yamabushi training—a rigorous spiritual practice associated with ascetic mountain hermits. This consideration becomes a way to honor her mother's memory while confronting her own fears and uncertainties.

The chapter culminates with invitations for readers to reflect on their own experiences with loss. Through prompts encouraging both conversation and

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written expression, the author underscores the transformative power of love and grief in shaping our lives, ultimately suggesting that sharing our feelings can facilitate healing and connection during tumultuous times.

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Chapter 7 Summary: 7. Release: Traveling light.

Chapter 7: Release Traveling Light

This chapter delves into the narrator's transformative journey during their yamabushi training, a rigorous practice rooted in Japanese mountain ascetic traditions focused on spiritual and physical discipline.

The Climb and Training Experience

The chapter opens with an account of the narrator's intense training regimen, which encompasses three mountains over three days, beginning with Gassan, a revered spiritual site. This journey is physically grueling, marked by fasting, silent contemplation, and exhausting climbs that strip away individual identities, fostering a deep connection with nature and the spiritual realm.

Family Dynamics and Emotional Struggles

As the narrative unfolds, we shift to the narrator's struggles with family dynamics during a trip to Japan. Here, the themes of personal loss and the strain of parenting emerge, highlighting a poignant internal conflict: the desire to craft joyful memories for their children while wrestling with grief.

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This emotional turmoil leads the narrator to a difficult decision—to send family members home early, creating a disruptive yet necessary space to process their feelings.

The Journey to Gassan

With the family gone, the narrator's yamabushi training at Gassan begins in earnest. Despite the shadows of grief, the climb takes on profound significance, becoming a path to healing and self-exploration. The ascent symbolizes not merely a physical challenge but also a spiritual communion with ancestral spirits, reinforcing the mountain's sacredness.

Realizations on the Summit

Upon reaching Gassan's summit, the narrator experiences a transformative spiritual awakening. Contemplating existence and identity, they come to a pivotal realization: releasing old identities opens pathways for renewal. The empowering prayer, "I am not afraid to die," serves as a metaphor for relinquishing the past and embracing transformative change.

Descent and Transformation

The descent from Gassan mirrors this internal transformation. As the narrator navigates down the mountain, they sense newfound strength and

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emotional liberation. This descent becomes a dual journey, illustrating both physical prowess and an emotional release. The chapter concludes with an invitation for readers to reflect on their own bittersweet experiences, urging them to confront delayed aspirations with courage and mindfulness, emphasizing the importance of living a life rich in love and acceptance.

Kokoro Work: Reflection Prompts

The chapter wraps up with thought-provoking prompts encouraging readers to explore their own experiences of joy and sorrow. It invites introspection on what they might pursue if unafraid of change, echoing the chapter's overarching themes of personal growth and emotional resilience.

Kokoro Wisdom

Ultimately, this chapter conveys that a fulfilling life is marked by the challenges and triumphs encountered throughout difficult experiences. Readers are encouraged to fully engage with their emotional and physical selves, embracing the journey toward meaningful change.

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Chapter 8: 8. Aging: Layers of life.

Chapter 8: Aging Layers of Life

Revisiting Hirosawa Pond

The narrator embarks on a nostalgic journey to Hirosawa Pond in Kyoto, a cherished site from their teenage years. As they reflect, they remember the comforting letters from university friends and a pivotal one from their mother. In this heartfelt message, their mother encourages them to seek happiness beyond conventional success metrics. This advice profoundly reshapes the narrator's perspective, emphasizing that true fulfillment arises from internal satisfaction and meaningful connections with others.

Encountering Past Selves

An upcoming reunion offers the narrator a chance to reconnect with old friends, sparking joyful reminiscences. However, beneath the laughter lies a shared understanding of grief, highlighting the complexities of aging and the impact of personal losses amid societal expectations. This gathering reminds the narrator and their friends of the importance of honoring their past selves and acknowledging the multifaceted nature of grief as they navigate life's transitions.

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Meeting the Younger Self

During a reflective visit to their former university, the narrator envisions an encounter with their younger self. In this imagined moment, they impart wisdom and reassurance about the future's challenges. This poignant exercise underscores the value of self-compassion and the necessity of remaining open to life's unpredictable paths. It serves as a meaningful reconciliation with past choices, illustrating the emotional growth attained through the passage of time.

Festival of Ten Thousand Lanterns

As the narrator participates in the MantMe Festival, ancestral spirits, they find solace and emotional release. The illuminating lanterns symbolically bridge life and death, fostering a sense of renewal and connection with the past. This poignant moment compels the narrator to reflect on the essence of living fully and the idea that healing is cultivated through life experiences rather than merely through the passage of time.

Kokoro Reflection

Concluding the chapter, the narrator invites readers to engage in reflective activities that prompt consideration of their own life stages and the wisdom

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accrued along the way. The Japanese concept of *kokoro*, which embodies the heart and spirit, is explored, emphasizing that wisdom matures and evolves with age. This guidance encourages a deeper understanding of life's complex journey.

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Chapter 9 Summary: 9. Returning: Becoming who we are

Chapter 9: Returning - Becoming Who We Are

In this chapter, the narrator embarks on a transformative journey through an experience known as *takigyū*, a waterfall training rite. This journey involves a deep understanding and reflection in certain spiritual practices. As they approach a torii gate that marks the beginning of this sacred rite, nerves surface at the thought of stepping barefoot into the icy cascade. The fierce rush of water poses challenges for meditation and breath control, yet amidst this chaos, the narrator encounters profound realizations about existence that reshape their perception of reality.

The experience prompts reflections on impermanence, a central concept in many Eastern philosophies, particularly in Buddhism, which emphasizes the transient nature of all things. Just as the waterfall flows and changes, so too do human lives consist of fleeting moments. This understanding diminishes the significance of everyday anxieties, freeing the narrator from rigid identities and fostering a liberating sense of acceptance.

After the ritual, the trainees, including the narrator, make their way to Yudono Shrine. Here, personal reflections surface, touching on painful memories such as the births of the narrator's children and the sorrow of

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losing their mother. These experiences echo the teachings of the Heart Sutra, which emphasizes the importance of seeking inner guidance amid life's inevitable transitions. The narrator recognizes the necessity of trusting one's kokoro, or heart, as a compass through grief and personal evolution.

As the narrator moves into reflections on midlife, they confront fears rooted in societal measures of success, such as efficiency, financial stability, and personal accomplishments. The intensifying anxiety that arises, often triggered by loss, compels them to embrace an authentic, fearless creative journey akin to writing, illustrating a parallel between creative expression and the essence of life itself.

The narrator argues that genuine creativity springs from the kokoro, encouraging a pursuit of long-buried dreams, particularly as midlife serves as a catalyst for self-discovery. This period invites individuals to embrace their deepest longings and navigate life's complexities to reveal their true selves.

The chapter culminates in a poignant call to return to authenticity, shedding societal pressures to live genuinely and creatively. The narrator emphasizes a commitment to honoring personal desires and simplifying one's existence, serving as a reminder of life's fleeting nature.

To engage readers further, reflection questions are proposed, inviting them to

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explore their creative aspirations and consider what they wish to pursue moving forward. Ultimately, the chapter underscores the idea that a fulfilling life is achieved through the full expression of our humanity, guided by the insights of the kokoro, nurturing connections with others and providing a collective recognition of shared experiences.

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Chapter 10 Summary: 10. Nourishment: Goodness in. Goodness out.

Chapter 10 Summary: Nourishment

The chapter opens with the narrator's delightful encounter with Obata-san, who invites them to assist at Fujiya Farm. Set against the backdrop of a tranquil kitchen garden affiliated with Matsunaga Rokkan, an inn that promotes a lifestyle infused with sensory experiences, this introduction sets the stage for exploring deeper themes of interconnectedness and simplicity.

As the narrative unfolds, it delves into the essence of "slow living," a philosophy deeply rooted in Japanese culture. Amidst the rapid changes brought on by modernization and consumerism, a burgeoning movement is emerging, drawing individuals back to rural areas in search of a more intentional and connected way of life. These changing dynamics highlight a yearning for community and nature, contrasting sharply with the fast-paced urban existence many have come to know.

Personal stories abound within this chapter as various characters share their transformative journeys from city living to rural life. Their narratives weave a rich tapestry of longing for meaningful relationships and the joys of simplicity. These individuals demonstrate a steadfast commitment not only

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to the land and its bounty but also to nurturing local traditions, forging deeper connections with one another through everyday activities.

The chapter then shifts to a culinary perspective, emphasizing the vital role food plays as a source of nourishment. Chef Nomura introduces the principles of *shojin ryōri*, or vegetarian temple cuisine, and three types of *kokoro*—delight, sincerity, and magnanimity—central to the art of cooking. This culinary philosophy encourages gratitude, mindfulness, and the recognition of food's healing powers, thereby enriching the act of dining.

A poignant meal at Sanaburi serves as a focal point for exploring how food interlinks with community and relationships. The act of sharing a meal becomes a profound expression of care, nourishing not just the body but also the heart and mind, fostering a sense of belonging and emotional sustenance.

Throughout the chapter, the narrator reflects on personal challenges, including environmental stressors and family health issues. These reflections lead to an understanding of the critical importance of slowing down and tuning into what truly nourishes them. The journey through rural Japan fosters a renewed appreciation for simple joys and the profound significance of human connection.

As the chapter draws to a close, it imparts wisdom about living a fulfilling

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life rooted in nourishment. Emphasizing the holistic nature of well-being, the text underscores that what we consume—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—profoundly impacts our overall health. This realization encourages readers to cultivate awareness of their relationships and habits, presenting them as essential components of nourishing one’s kokoro, or spirit.

The chapter wraps up with a tantalizing hint at Chapter 11, which will explore the themes of wholeheartedness and the significance of living in the present moment.

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Chapter 11 Summary: 11. Wholeheartedness: The time is now

Chapter 11: Wholeheartedness - The Time is Now

Summary

Chapter 11 opens at Shimoike Pond, a serene setting alive with the sight of thousands of swans taking flight. This imagery symbolizes the journey of facing new challenges head-on. The narrator reflects on a transformative encounter with Daisuke Yamanaka, a dynamic and inspiring CEO who made the bold decision to leave a stable corporate job in Tokyo. Seeking freedom and creativity, he relocated to Yamagata, a region known for its natural beauty and rich agricultural traditions. Yamanaka passionately emphasizes the importance of living in the present, asserting that true opportunities stem from a keen awareness of one's current circumstances and the larger world.

The narrative then introduces Onodera-san, a character whose life took a remarkable turn following a cancer diagnosis. Rather than succumb to her health challenges, she channeled her experience into creating an organic farm-to-table restaurant. This venture not only supports her family but also promotes health and well-being within her community. Both Yamanaka and Onodera exemplify how recognizing opportunities is deeply intertwined

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with their life stages and the socio-economic context in which they operate.

Yamanaka's decision-making philosophy is refreshingly straightforward. He emphasizes focusing on tasks that bring him joy and fulfillment while steering clear of activities that drain his energy or require excessive effort. His approach to leadership prioritizes employee happiness over strict adherence to mission-driven goals, showcasing his belief that a meaningful life is achievable without regrets. Yamanaka advocates for embracing experiences that lead to personal satisfaction and growth.

Kokoro Work: Wholeheartedness

The chapter concludes with a series of reflective questions designed to prompt readers to evaluate their own lives. It encourages them to identify potential opportunities and consider actionable steps that align with their true passions and a more effortless way of living.

Kokoro Wisdom

Emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, the closing insights suggest that a meaningful life is achieved by tuning into one's own sensations. By navigating choices that resonate with personal truths and values, individuals can foster a deeper connection to their authentic selves and the world around them.

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Chapter 12: 12. Intentionally: We get to have this day

Chapter 12: Intentionality - We Get to Have This Day

The chapter opens with the narrator embarking on a pilgrimage up the 2,446 stone steps of Hagurosan at dawn. This journey is not merely a physical ascent; it serves as a metaphor for navigating personal grief—the recent loss of a friend and the illness of their mother. As the narrator climbs, they grapple with a blend of emotions, reflecting on how this pilgrimage becomes a path of both sorrow and self-discovery.

Upon reaching the summit, the narrator participates in a sacred shrine ceremony, where feelings of gratitude flood in. This moment emphasizes the rich tapestry of experiences that have shaped their understanding of **kokoro**, a Japanese term encapsulating the connection between the heart and mind, symbolizing wisdom born from lived experiences.

The journey continues in a more introspective vein as the narrator engages in a taxi conversation about legacy. They come to realize that a meaningful legacy is less about material possessions and more about the richness of life experiences, the depth of relationships, and the positive impact one has on others. This revelation highlights the importance of living each day fully, fostering connections, and finding joy in the mundane.

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Arriving at ShMrenin temple, the narrator's thoughts and the philosophical concept of **wabi sabi**, which celebrates the beauty in imperfection and transience. They delve into the idea of five distinct qualities of kokoro: amenable, reflective, dedicated, humble, and appreciative. These qualities advocate for a communal existence and underscore the interconnectedness among individuals, urging everyone to cultivate these traits in their daily lives.

As the scene shifts to England, the narrator observes the breathtaking beauty of autumn, which prompts reflections on family, the passage of time, and enduring grief. This part of the chapter poignantly illustrates the cycle of life, suggesting that grief is an intrinsic element of the human experience and a crucial aspect of what it means to live.

In the final meditation, the narrator contemplates the duality of time—acknowledging the weight of past experiences while embracing the possibilities of new beginnings. The imagery of a golden sphere embodies a vibrant connection to life, capturing the essence of their experiences along with the dynamic energy of kokoro. The chapter culminates in a powerful call to live intentionally and gratefully, inviting readers to cherish each fleeting moment.

Kokoro Work: Intentionality challenges readers to ponder what

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genuinely matters in their own lives, emphasizing the significance of approaching existence with intention and gratitude.

Kokoro Wisdom ultimately reinforces that a life well lived is one characterized by intentionality and connection, urging readers to greet each day with purpose and appreciation.

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