

## TAKING CARE OF THE SELF: RECOVERY AND ADDICTION

### **Coping Strategies for Addicts**

*These coping and relaxation strategies for addicts is a continuation from "This is an Emergency!" by Ven. Chönyi Taylor and "What is a 12-Step Buddhist?" by Darren Littlejohn, from the January-March 2011 issue of Mandala located on page 49-50.*

### **Generosity and The Addict**

*By Darren Littlejohn*

Begin with a quiet breathing practice to calm the mind. For example, notice the rate and character of the in-breath. Is there grasping? Pause for a moment before exhaling. Notice if there is a sense of fullness and completeness or if there's desire to exhale or inhale more. Exhale slowly. Notice the out-breath. Is there pushing or allowing on the exhale? Before breathing in, remain empty for a moment. Notice any attachment associated with the desire to breathe in. Repeat.

To understand how the Aspect of Self that is the Addict thinks and feels, we speak in the first person, as that Aspect of Self. In this practice, try to own the voice of your inner Addict. As the Addict, write or speak aloud your answers to the following questions. This can also be done with the help of another person asking the questions. Remember to stay "in voice."

Who are you? (e.g., I am the Addict)

Why are you called the Addict?

What do you desire? Relief? Have you ever found it?

Did it last or was it impermanent? How do you, as the Addict, feel about the impermanence of suffering and happiness?

How do you benefit the Self? (remember to speak of the Self in the 3rd person – e.g., I help him find relief from suffering)

What are you willing to do to find relief? What are some things you have done?

Does the Self understand how much work you do? Does he/she appreciate your efforts?

How do you harm the Self?

What lines have you crossed in the search for relief?

As the Addict, are you a Giver or a Taker?

How do you, as the Addict, honestly feel about the practice of Generosity?

What does it feel like for you to give?

What do you give to the Self? What do you take from the Self?

What does the Self need from you?

*Excerpted from [The 12-Step Buddhist](http://the12stepbuddhist.com), a complimentary guide and set of practices to the traditional 12-step journey for addicts. Published by Beyond Words 2009. Reprinted with permission. <http://the12stepbuddhist.com>*

## **Breathing and Relaxing Exercises**

*By Ven. Chonyi Taylor*

Once the immediate crisis is over, we can add these breathing and relaxing exercises to help us calm down even more. They are easy to learn and take up little time, but they can be very effective.

*First Exercise: The Out-Breath*

This is a tool to use when we have, say, thirty seconds so we can improve our ability to relax. We do this by deliberately making a slight difference to the way in which we usually breathe. We concentrate on breathing out.

The body unconsciously relaxes with each out-breath, so in this exercise we deliberately let our bodies relax a little more deeply with the out-breath. It is best to do this when we are at the bottom of that breath, just before we have the urge to breathe in.

Now for the next few moments, as we breathe out, we let our bodies relax. Then when we feel like it, we just let the in-breath happen of its own accord. We only need to do this a few times for it to be successful. As we practice this little relaxation exercise, we can become very skilled at it.

Usually our chest drops down and our ribs become relaxed when we breathe out. We continue to concentrate on each out-breath and discover for ourselves what else relaxes as we breathe out. Where in my body do I feel tension releasing? We each notice what our own body feels like in that pause between breathing out and breathing in.

With a clearer and more relaxed space in our minds, then we can make a better decision about what to do. We can think more clearly about what is happening around us and notice what our mind is doing. Do we really need to be caught in the grasping of our addiction? Do we really need to behave in a destructive way? Do we want to behave differently this time? What do I want to do now?

### **Second Exercise: The In-Breath**

In this exercise, we are trying to be a little more mindful of what our body is doing as we breathe.

We breathe in until our *whole* chest feels tight with air. Some people think that they have filled their chest with air when in fact they have only filled part of the chest, usually the top part. The bottom part also needs to be filled. Filling this part will push the tummy out because the lungs press down toward the abdomen. Now we hold this breath and count to three. Count quickly if necessary.

Then, we let everything go quickly: both breath and body. We relax everything as fast and as fully as we can. We can make noises as we do this: grunts or puffs. When we are ready, take our next big breath.

- ◎ We do this at least three times.
- ◎ Now we let our breathing return to whatever it wants to do.
- ◎ After our breathing returns to normal, we can repeat the cycle: we breathe in deeply and let the breath go quickly three times and then relax our breathing and our body...

When we have become familiar with these exercises [including combining breathing and relaxing, and an effective “mental spa bath”] we can choose to use them when we are feeling stressed or anxious or panicky or afraid. We do not need a special place or a lot of time... Even if we only get this far, we have made important changes that we can be proud of.

*Excerpted from the chapter entitled “What can be done right now?” from Enough! A Buddhist Approach to Finding Release from Addictive Patterns by Chonyi Taylor. Published by Snow Lion Publications 2010. Reprinted with permission. [www.snowlionpub.com](http://www.snowlionpub.com)*