

RECOVERY from SPIRITUAL AMNESIA



31. Moving Toward the Light

One of my buddies, Larry Whitlock, an extraordinary teacher, once said to me, "God is the Light; and yet so many Christians acknowledge Him and live in His Spirit only while in church. They do not share his word, his love, and his power with their families and communities as they go about their everyday lives. They seem to be unaware that on Sundays they temporarily worship in the shadow cast by the Light."

The NAP is a barrier between us and the Light. The NAP's function is "en-darken-ment," not enlightenment.

Without the Light, we cannot transcend our NAPs.

Without the Light, we cannot recover from Spiritual Amnesia.

Without the Light, we cannot celebrate our Unique Blessings.

We live in shadow, or darkness, when the NAP gets in the way of the Light.

Members of many religions and spiritual disciplines face the dilemma of living in the shadow cast by the light. Many of us believe that if we just follow the rules, perform the rituals, and pray fervently, we will be blessed in this life, and either welcomed to heaven in the afterlife or blessed with a better life the next time around.

Buddha, however, was not one for living in the shadows. In fact, he spent forty days out in the desert sitting under the bodhi tree, determined to attain enlightenment. He was totally committed to recovering from Spiritual Amnesia and liberating himself from his NAP. And he succeeded!

Buddha was a true "guru," or "dispeller of darkness," (Sanskrit). Buddha was proactive and accountable for living in the Light.

Buddha's gift to us was a path to enlightenment, one of many wonderful ways for all of us to discover and explore living in the Light. One story records his desire for us to learn and to put into practice this gift as his '*dying wish*' for humanity.

Some cultures have a long-standing tradition that demands that if a person asks a favor of a relative or friend, no matter how difficult it may be to grant, and states, "This is my dying wish," then that person being asked is obligated to do absolutely everything in his or her power to grant the wish. However, once that wish has been fulfilled, or, if not, a committed and strenuous effort has been made, then the asker may never again request even the smallest favor of that person.

Buddha's dying wish for humanity was that we keep his teachings alive through daily meditation, commitment and dedication, exemplary practice, and mutual humanistic service. Further, he asked that we never ritualize these teachings or make a religion of them.

And finally, "Please, no statues!"

Yet because of our individual, cultural, and religious NAPs, we commonly ignore the powerful wisdom of his life's work and dismiss his dying wish. Even as a master of non-attachment, Buddha may sometimes spin in his grave. I can easily imagine a tachometer on his headstone.

There is an old Hebrew saying that on the Day of Reckoning, each of us will be held accountable before God for every positive pleasure that we might have enjoyed or shared or celebrated during our gift of life, but somehow failed to achieve.

Until we become proactive and accountable for exploring our own paths to enlightenment, the NAP is going to get us in big trouble!

I believe that we must each discover or create purposeful ways of being if we are to recover from Spiritual Amnesia and take apart the faulty wiring of our Negative Automatic Programs. And I know we will be Helped as we help ourselves.

Reflecting on Buddha's dying wish for a moment, I consider it an extraordinarily generous wish for people of all religions and for those with no religion. My understanding of his message is that we can ritualize our response to suffering, or we can act generously to support each other in transcending the NAP and recovering from Spiritual Amnesia!

Followers of Jesus and others who inspire us to celebrate our unique blessings will know that, like Buddha, none of them sought to establish a religion. Rather, they all chose to serve as models and teachers of the best practices of compassion, humanistic empowerment, self-leadership, spiritual growth, and service to their own and our brothers and sisters.

We can and must become proactive and accountable for liberating ourselves and each other from our NAPs and Spiritual Amnesia.

32. Faked Out by My NAP

One of the times I was faked out by my NAP occurred during a very productive and happy period in my career. I was tightly scheduled every day leading guided peer counseling programs at several high schools and at a maximum security prison, consulting with social services and the police force, and teaching evenings and weekends at a couple of local colleges. Over several months I had become increasingly tired, and although I loved the challenge, growth, and interaction my work provided; I realized I was burning out from the sheer volume of training, counseling, coordinating, teaching, writing, and driving.

I went away to visit some friends over a long weekend and had a fine time, eating well, sleeping late, and not being available for crisis calls. When I returned to my office on Monday morning, I greeted my friend, Larry.

"Hey! I had a great weekend!" I reported enthusiastically. "I have twice the amount of energy as I did last week!"

"Well, good for you!" my friend responded. "That means you may be back up to ten percent!" Evidently, Larry's perception was that lately, I'd been running along at only five percent.

Larry was right on target. I felt so much better that I naively I assumed I was back to full strength. In truth, I had only begun to feel energized and still needed months of rest, nourishment, and recreation to restore a consistent and natural level of empowered well-being.

I began to realize living with an everyday normal, NAP-limited amount of mediocre energy is very different from a natural, optimal amount of Self-generated energy.

33. The Cause of Suffering

Suffering is caused by attachment. Clinging. Holding on. Judging. Getting stuck on a point of view, or an illusion. Extreme attachment is called addiction. Addiction to alcohol, drugs, romantic entanglements, and other self-limiting habits can lead us to believe that we need something so badly that we cannot "live" without it. Addiction to an illusion is called "delusion."

It is easy to cling to ideas, beliefs, plans, material possessions, and notions of "being right." One can get stuck on a righteous point of view or on one's romantic idealizations of a person -- "Johnny's stuck on Sally!" In fact, there is a continuum of "stuckness" by which one can gauge an attachment from very light to something so heavy it can make us slaves.

The 'Stuck Continuum' looks like this:

Indifference
 Preference
 Desire
 Attachment
 Obsession
 Compulsion
 Addiction

The farther down this scale we go, the more we are being controlled by our NAPs. Examples include: Losing (really finding) your temper (at the worst possible moment), being unable to move on from a romantic involvement that is clearly over, experiencing low self-esteem, blaming or feuding with others; and addictions to alcohol, drugs, egomania, food, gambling, marijuana, promiscuity, shopping, spending, and/or tobacco.

Recovery requires that we attentively and purposefully climb "up" one rung at a time on the Stuck Continuum. Letting go takes patience and practice, like getting in shape for running. It would be foolish to attempt a five-kilometer run, or a marathon, on the first day of training. So, too, would it be to expect ourselves to get over a relationship, or anything else we are stuck on, in a day.

Getting ourselves stuck took some time . . . and so will getting ourselves unstuck.

If we are not careful, we may inappropriately blunder and permit the NAP to take over our recovery or training program. The NAP will automatically sabotage us unless we stay relentlessly aware of it. The danger of a NAP take-over, especially when we are fatigued or highly stressed, requires our conscious, deliberate, and steady attention.

Remember, the sole function of the Prime Directive is to protect and to perpetuate the NAP. It makes us forget about the NAP, Spiritual Amnesia, and our Unique Blessings.

Between the Negative Automatic Program and the Prime Directive, almost everything we experience is subject to distortion, misunderstanding, and fouled-up processing. As this is a common human condition, we accept it as "normal." Unfortunately, we take THAT for granted.

Our NAPs run us through all kinds of confusion and misery, and yet we often ignore the consequences, deny we have a NAP, try to ignore the frustration and limited joy in our lives, and continue to enable ourselves to suffer in each other's lack of presence.

This happens in spite of the ways we "try" to improve ourselves and better our existential circumstances through reading self-help books, joining co-dependence support groups, journaling about our personal scripts, rebirthing, channeling, regressing to famous past lives, and placing crystals in our belly buttons or under our pillows in hopes of liberation and/or enlightenment. Might there be cause for alarm?

What has to happen before the Emperor feels a draft? Or a tornado?

Could the Negative Automatic Program and Spiritual Amnesia have anything to do with the current sorry ways of being so common in this world -- the vast suffering, stupidity, corruption, and evil; and concurrently, the limited freedoms, rarity of selfless service, and absence of joy? Imagine the cumulative effect of millions and millions of NAPs on the suppression of our potentials for living together peacefully and prosperously in spiritual harmony on a healthy planet.

All the self-help paraphernalia in the world is not going to make a positive difference in our lives until we recognize, accept, and commit ourselves to becoming proactive and accountable, individually and as a planetary community, for liberation from Spiritual Amnesia and the NAP.

This IS the planet of the NAPs!

How dramatic does the situation have to become before we each become proactive and accountable for waking ourselves, and joining together in rousing our planetary siblings?

I recommend a fresh beginning to waking ourselves and leading by example to motivate others to awaken themselves.

34. Choosing My Emotions

When I was a little kid, I was usually pretty happy. At rare times, when one of my parents or my sister would say or do something I didn't like, I would feel very sorry for myself and then loudly and self-righteously complain, "You ruined my whole day! It was perfect until now and you spoiled it!" Then I would pout and be inconsolable. Sometimes I would run up to my room and cry.

Much later in life I realized that there is no such thing as My Day. It was simply an idealized concept about which my little mind was obsessed. I had assumed My Day was something recognizable and important to others and they should put Their Days on hold in support of mine.

I am the creator of my own experience, as I am the inventor of notions like My Day, and What's Fair, and Being Right. I am also the author of my own emotions, whether I prefer those emotions or not; and whether I am willing to be accountable for them.

"How can that be?" you ask. "Other people MAKE me happy or angry or sad. If someone else says or does something, I can't help my emotional reaction. It's simple cause and effect."

Let us suppose that it is a Saturday afternoon, 1:03 p.m., and I am sitting at my kitchen table listening to an old record album playing "White Bird" while I rebuild the carburetor for my ancient Dodge Dart. Imagine I am wearing some old blue jeans and a red Smith College T-shirt.

My friend, Elvira, strolls in wearing an outfit that any model would kill for, grabs a soda from the fridge, and says, "Hey, Vanderbeck! Let's grab some lunch down at the beach!"

The remote possibility exists that I might react impolitely and say something like, "Couldn't you have called first? I'm busy with this carburetor, and now you've ruined my concentration."

In this instance, my rudeness, straight from the NAP, would create tension and dissonance between us, something I would never do on purpose. And we probably wouldn't go to lunch.

Now, imagine that a year has passed and through a miraculous chain of coincidences, that exact same scenario is recurring: Saturday, 1:03 p.m., at the kitchen table listening to "White Bird", and once again, I am rebuilding my Dart carburetor. 'Same jeans and Smith College T-shirt, too. Elvira saunters in, looking fabulous, as always. Deja vu!

Imagine, too, that Elvira is wearing the exact same outfit (as if that would ever happen), grabs a soda, and says, "Hey, Vanderbeck! Let's grab some lunch down by the beach." Just like last time.

However, on this occasion I look up, smile, and reply, "Sounds good to me, Elvira. Let's go!" And I abandon my little carburetor project and shift my attention to my dear friend, Elvira. This time I stay out of the NAP and respond appropriately, as my authentic Self, in greeting my buddy.

There is no way I could truthfully say of these two identical situations that on one occasion Elvira made me feel distracted and irritated, and on the other occasion she made me feel glad for her companionship. It MUST be that I create my own experience!

I will react, or I will respond. My automatic and reactive NAP shows up . . . or my on-purpose authentic Self shows up. And either way, I am accountable for my behavior.

What if it is true that only I, myself, create all my feelings and emotions? If so, then I have probably caused myself an over abundance of pain and suffering and a great loss of satisfaction and fulfillment.

What if I am entirely accountable for all my emotions, and for even "not-feeling"? Doesn't it follow that only I make myself happy or angry or sad? And only I can wisely choose my way of experiencing my feelings and emotions.

And when I do any of this automatically, I am still accountable for it. After all, it's MY automaticity! So, I can be accountable for this automaticity without feeling guilty about it. I am accountable for my NAP; and I need not feel guilty when I catch myself reacting from it.

The good news is, since it's my automaticity, my NAP, I can clean it up and replace it with awareness, response-ability, and purposeful action. No one else has to change his or her attitude or behavior. No one (not even me) has to take the rap for my past experiences with guilt, blame, or shame. And I do not have to wait for someone else to apologize or approve or give me permission to drop my ego and get out of my mind.

I am free to awaken from my NAP, choose my emotions, and empower my Self.

35. So What!

One summer, I coached a women's soccer team. They decided to call themselves the Mean Mothers, even though they were all sweethearts and half of them were single and/or had no children.

Most of the players had little soccer experience, and of those who had the most skill, only a few had ever played together on the same squad. My enthusiastic neophytes were all charged up to "play" what Pele called, "The Beautiful Game."

We would have to collaborate and cooperate in developing a conscious game, an opposite of the usual beginners' version of twenty lemmings on amphetamines. The common introduction to soccer usually involves everyone except the goalies in a group enterprise of careening around the field in a flailing huddle, all trying to kick the ball at the same time. This is why little kids are required to wear shin guards.

Because of the wide variety of my players' experience, fitness, skill, and commitment to attend our practice sessions; I had to design a strategy that would be effective for competition and which would not require frequent substitutions of exhausted or injured players.

Ball control and accurate passing would be essential if we were going to be able to defend and attack quickly and effectively. In this way, we could move the ball and our tactics with a minimum of running, a necessity, as my players exhibited a notable dearth of endurance, as well as a shared unwillingness to participate in any fitness training.

My novices were clueless about even basic ball-handling skills, and I was confident they would go through a learning process punctuated by abundant mistakes. This apprenticeship would include almost unlimited opportunities for each player to spaz-out over what looks easy and isn't, and to feel discouraged. A player might muff making a simple pass or even wiff, completely missing on an attempt to connect with the ball. At times, folks would get so frustrated they would loudly herald their repertoire of expletives while walking off the field in disgust.

I realized they were in essence kicking themselves, rather than the ball, both reinforcing their frustration and guaranteeing repetition of their recent errors. They were not aware that temporary disillusionment is a necessary stage of development on the way to mastery of soccer, and mastery of everything else we approach to learn.

After seeing this phenomenon many times in the first few practices, I called my players in for a sit-down at the middle of the field.

"You are learning soccer," I began, "and I am counting on you to make lots of mistakes and to sometimes feel foolish as you develop your ball-handling skills. You each have an important decision to make about this period of learning. You can demand too much of yourself and then get disappointed or frustrated whenever you don't live up to your own unrealistic expectations.

"Or you can cut yourself some slack and accept in advance that as individuals and as a team, you will commit every sin known to soccer. And that's okay, because we will learn from our own mistakes as well as from those we observe around us.

"From now on, when you make a mistake, immediately start playing again with even more attention and spirit! Your mistake was either because you had not yet mastered a particular skill and its application to that situation, or, as a master, you were not paying full attention. Even so, whichever mistake you may have made just half a second ago is now ancient history. It is irreversible and unchangeable, regardless of how you feel about it. Keep on playing!

"I am instituting the "So What Rule" for our team. Whenever you see one of your teammates make a mistake, immediately say or shout to that person, "So What!" And when someone reminds you with a "So What," reminding you that it's okay to learn from your mistakes - pay attention and keep on playing . . . and respond with a "Thank You!"

From that day forward we heard LOTS of "So What's" and "Thank You's." At times, players actually got out their "Thank You's" faster than the forthcoming "So What's" as they kept playing. My ladies had freed themselves to grow quickly as individual players and as a cohesive and mutually supportive team.

During the championship game, my Mothers often "So-Whatted" each other. This prompted the coach of the other team to lodge a complaint with the referee about our "unsportsmanlike" conduct. I explained the "So What Rule" to the referee. He approved and allowed our custom.

At the final whistle we lost on points, three to two; but we had won by playing a great game and sharing a fine afternoon with friends and families!

We will all make almost unlimited mistakes, goofs, and blunders if we are committed to lifelong learning. So, why not, "So What?" It's a very effective way of staying in the present and continuing to play the game of life.

36. Run for Your Life

About the same time as "Father Knows Best" aired, there was a show called "Run for Your Life." It was about a man who discovers that he has only six months left to live. According to the storyline, he'll be fine, feeling great for six months, until the last Aloha. He determines to live the rest of his life fully, and to realize as many of his dreams and goals as possible. He becomes committed to making the most of each of his remaining days and nights.

Each episode would find him doing something challenging, exciting, and new -- racing cars, cliff diving in Mexico, playing guitar and singing, visiting an old friend, and other adventures. He chose to not exist automatically, but to spend the rest of his time living consciously and on-purpose. His life mission becomes one of prioritizing how to make his remaining time rewarding and fulfilling. He committed to maximize sharing and celebrating his life with family and friends, and also several obligatory television show love interests.

It was a rare, compelling, and personally challenging show.

37. More on Accountability

I am accountable for how I experience my life. Whether or not I am aware of it, I am accountable for whether I choose to act consciously and response-ably, or to abdicate my life to the control of my NAP. How I play the game of life is up to me. Denying my personal accountability does not change the truth; even if I use elaborate and persuasive reasons, excuses, and rationalizations.

There is no way out of accountability.

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38. Hope and Faith

When we decide to stop trying, we can focus our attention on our intention. This empowers us to quickly become more purposeful, self-directed, and proactive about making positive advances and achieving satisfying results in the quality and meaning of our daily lives. Then we have another decision to make, whether to indulge in hope or to focus on faith. There is a profound difference between hope and faith.

Hope requires no responsibility, action, or accountability on my part. Hope is a passive endeavor in which, if things don't turn out my way, I may feel disappointed, undeserving, and righteously wronged. Hope is simply a covert and lazy way of trying.

Faith demands that I be proactive and accountable for making the best use of my Unique Blessings. Faith requires an active commitment from me, to me; that I will do whatever it takes to transcend my NAP and recover from Spiritual Amnesia. Only through faith may I live fully and completely. Faith provides me with a soulful certainty that Spiritual Amnesia cannot endure in the Light. Give up wishing and hoping! Quit trying!

Wishing and hoping result in trying experiences. Faith is a demonstration of trust in one's true Self. Act as if you have faith, and you will discover courage. Spiritual Amnesia cannot withstand Faith. Act as if you have Faith! -- Act as if you have faith and it will be given to you.

39. Problem Solving

When my car breaks down and I cannot fix it with the diverse skills I have learned and the many tools that I have accumulated, I will ask for assistance from one of my shade tree mechanic friends, motor-head buddies, or occasionally, even from a professional mechanic. If my health breaks down and some Band-Aids or vitamin C won't do the trick, I will go for medical help."

Let's imagine that part of my life is not working out the way I had expected, hoped, imagined or planned . . . perhaps even fervently prayed that it would. "I'm not experiencing enough pleasure, growth, and fulfillment." I wonder, "What's wrong with my life?" or "Why can't I have what I want?" or "What did I do to deserve this?" or "When are things going to get better?"

At these times, we all experience feelings of confusion, doubt, and helplessness. When this happens, we have an opportunity to wake up to a LOUD ALARM signaling that the NAP is operating and may be in charge of the situation.

I have options. I may decide to confide in an old trusted friend, someone who knows me well and upon whom I can rely for acceptance, support, insight, compassion, honesty, and encouragement. Possibly my personal concerns are too intimate to tell even a very close friend, or maybe they are ABOUT my close friend. So, I may decide that the magnitude of my concerns warrants the expertise of a trained professional counselor, psychologist, therapist, or psychotherapist. Perhaps I may share my intimate and vulnerable personal concerns with a minister, priest, rabbi, or other spiritually oriented advisor.

If my car breaks down and I can't fix it, the sensible thing to do is to take the car to a mechanic. Yet, I am aware that there are many mechanics out there who are not all that skilled, or who may be skilled, but without integrity.

So, before allowing a mechanic to work on my car, I will call around, talk with friends, get references, visit a few garages to see how clean and orderly they are, and maybe even call Consumer Affairs and the Better Business Bureau. After all, I want the job done right; if my brakes or steering controls fail, my life could be at stake. It's worth the time and effort to search out a member of the top five percent of mechanics who are both technically expert and highly ethical.

More dramatically, if I am injured or ill and the malady is something beyond first aid or bed rest and lots of fluids, I will certainly call a doctor. If my body breaks down and I can't fix it, I want help immediately. Again, my life could be at stake!

Although this scenario holds far more serious consequences and risks, one generally assumes that professionally trained and licensed physicians are almost all technically expert and highly ethical. Besides, I may be suffering, stressed, and feeling confused and helpless.

As the NAP will certainly be operating to some extent, it will be easy for me to temporarily deny any risks of medical mistreatment by a complete stranger. Therefore, if I do not have a regular doctor who is immediately available, I may have to settle for whoever is "on call," or visit the nearest emergency room and hope for the best.

However, if my *life* breaks down and it's beyond my abilities, it would seem logical to go to a "life mechanic" -- counselor, minister, psychologist, rabbi, or therapist -- whether for a tune-up or a complete overhaul. But somehow I may resist; I am tempted to do nothing. Often, "It's not that important," or "It can wait." Or, I have some other reason and excuse for not transcending the NAP, recovering from Spiritual Amnesia, or healing my emotional wounds, psychological maladies, and/or spiritual dis-ease.

I may dull or mask the Not-Big-Deal-That-I-Don't-Mind with denial, chemicals, and other dysfunctional distractions. And I may hang around with others doing the same thing so we can negatively support each other in our ongoing immobility. The tacit agreement to form an enabling group somehow seems to legitimize our staying stuck in our "normal" states of confusion, frustration, and suffering. We may silently collude to embrace and exploit each other as children of the NAP. We can join together in becoming self-deceptive Spiritual Amnesiac junkies.

This is more evidence of the Prime Directive protecting the Negative Automatic Program.

The truth is we all need acceptance, support, humor, wisdom, and encouragement in our liberations from the NAP and recoveries from Spiritual Amnesia.

40. Expert Help

Consider those extraordinarily rare, high-integrity, master auto mechanics and body shop wizards who have a down-to-earth, "Let's get this car fixed!" approach to their work. Compare that orientation to those therapists who promote, analyze, and endlessly process the emotional pasts and current meanderings of their clients. They assure those troubled folks that their liberation is nigh and they will soon be approaching insights and breakthroughs, even as they continue to reveal, discuss, and interpret their personal histories at a far slower rate than they are creating them. This collusion of symbiotic NAPs, an intermittently reinforcing dysfunctional collaboration between the NAP of the client and the NAP of the therapist, assures the monthly payments on those professionals' fine dining, private ballroom dance lessons, Tahoe timeshares, luxury cars, one-time-wear designer fashions, trophy dates, and ongoing and lifelong personal therapies.

There ARE well trained, highly skilled, wise, and even enlightened counselors, mentors, and therapists with clear professional ethics and solid personal integrity. Searching out the right one to be your guide or mentor could result in positively transforming your entire life; so it is certainly worth investing the time to perform thorough research. After all, the quality of your life is at stake!

41. The Missing Step in Changing Automatic Behaviors

Initially, it seems simple to change behavior. If one has a really "bad" habit, actually an undesired automatic negative behavior that's sapping your vitality and personal fulfillment, it seems logical to "just stop it." Perhaps it would be easier to replace the automatic bad habit with a positive good habit, or a consciously chosen, on-purpose, and desired positive behavior.

Apparently, there are two simple steps:

- A. Stop the bad habit.
- B. Start the good habit.

Marcia had tried this approach to stop smoking. She tried many times. When it didn't work she felt guilty. Unfortunately, guilt guarantees repetition of the undesired automatic behavior.

She forgot to kick the plan instead of kicking herself. Kicking the plan makes sense here, because although the two simple steps sound logical, they are unworkable.

Changing automatic negative behaviors actually requires THREE steps. They are:

- STEP 1: After you notice an undesired automatic negative behavior, accept it just the way it is continue the automatic undesired negative behavior for a while does away with guilt, and enables you to see your automatic triggers, cut the NAP out of the scenario, preempt the Prime Directive, and begin to assert your personal and proactive powers.

STEP 2: Observe the "automaticity" carefully. Take some notes on how this routine operates. Study the habit. Learn its triggers and how it works. (This is the Missing Step.) Step Two allowed her to really pay attention to what she had been doing automatically, without awareness of the big picture and all of the negative consequences.

During the next several days Marcia paid attention and took notes about her automatic smoking program. She learned she always lit up when she started the coffeepot in the morning, after she started her car to begin the drive to work, whenever she was slowed down or stuck in traffic, often when she was on the phone at work, at coffee breaks, five minutes before her lunch break was over, reading the mail upon returning home, with coffee after dinner, and whenever her ex-husband telephoned (she would smoke continually until the conversation was over). She was smoking a pack and a half daily.

I asked her how much of her smoking she enjoyed. "Well," she pondered, "Lots of times I don't really pay attention because I'm busy or my attention is on something else. I DO notice when one's mostly gone, or if it's the last one in the pack. I guess if I count twenty puffs to the cigarette, on the average I probably pay attention to four puffs -- maybe two at the beginning and two at the end. But then that last cigarette of the day with my coffee after dinner is somehow special. I really pay attention to that one!"

"Okay," I responded, "Then, excluding your 'dessert' cigarette, you just told me that you are aware of only 20 percent of your smoking; that is, four puffs out of twenty drags per cigarette."

"I guess you're right. Yes, that's about it. Most of the time, I don't even realize I've lit up. And sometimes I have two cigarettes going at the same time in different ashtrays."

"I guess you're right. Yes, that's about it. Most of the time, I don't even realize I've lit up. And sometimes I have two cigarettes going at the same time in different ashtrays."

"So, you're telling me you enjoy twenty-percent of your smoking. Yet, you are purchasing and expensing five times as many cigarettes as you enjoy. And your lungs are getting the impact of ALL the cigarettes you smoke. Does that pretty much cover it?" I inquired.

She paused, a quizzical little smile on her face. "That's a new perspective!"

STEP 3: About a week following our discussion, she had cut down to 20-percent of a pack and a half to just six cigarettes a day. And she would only smoke when she was deliberately and attentively smoking. She simply refused to light one unless she had chosen the opportunity to fully focus on it, just like her "dessert" cigarette. When she caught herself lighting up automatically or halfway through an "automatic cigarette" as she now termed them, she would not beat herself up about it. She would simply put it out.

The Missing Step empowered Marcia to shift her behavior from automatic to on-purpose, consciously, and deliberately at her own speed. When last I spoke with Marcia, she told me she had cut down to three cigarettes a day; and she anticipated stopping altogether in the next month. This rate of change worked for her. It will be different for each of us depending upon the dynamics of our NAPs and how deliberately we practice the three steps.

I recall that Marcia once told me she often noticed her cigarette only when it was almost burned out. Thinking about that, I realize that sometimes I will buy a "walking ice cream cone" and not really pay much attention to it until it's almost gone. Then I will stop the world for a moment to savor those last few swirls and licks.

Wouldn't it be strange if we approached lovemaking like that? "Wait a minute, Honey, are we almost done? Gee, I'd better start paying attention!"

Playing the game of life With A Full Deck
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