

As the Smoke Clears...

Bringing Your Life into Balance via Smoke Cessation Meditation

By Carol Hicks

Smoking is a sacred contract. Ending it is a BIG deal – and yet, at the same time, it's as easy as taking a nice deep breath and letting it go, establishing a rhythm of easy, smoke free breathing.

So begin by getting yourself in a comfortable seated or semi-reclining position with adequate head and neck support. Turn off the obvious distractions so you can bring your attention to the miracle of your breath. Each breath its own unique and separate miracle. Take in a long, deep, satisfying drag of life force. Take it in to your own count of 5 and then hold full for the count of five. Now exhale slowly to the count of 5 and push even more air out as you begin to feel empty and hold empty for another count of 5. Continue breathing like this for twenty breaths, counting silently to yourself. Realizing that any given breath is in effect an elevator that you can step your consciousness into and ride it down to the core of calm chamber within you. At the first signal of an urge to smoke, you simply Stop! Drop! And Roll your awareness inward, as if you were on fire. Ride that wave of curiosity, wondering to yourself as you drop into a Wonderland world of comfort and joy and immense wellbeing. An eerily still eye of a hurricane, completely removed from the tumultuous winds that swirl around the periphery and yet inside them at their absolute center – at the heart of the matter.

Not trying to do anything, or get anywhere, or fix anything. Just observing from a dispassionate perspective. No judgment. What intentions do I have? What do I want? Maybe you might want to begin with simply experiencing pure and complete relaxation and presence inside your skin. And while you are counting breaths, add a silent internal soundtrack while exhaling slowly and completely at the next out breath: "I am completely relaxed..." even though you know it to be a lie you are intentionally telling yourself. It is actually your intention and you volitionally put it in the present tense to set that reality in motion. "At this time..." you add on the next out breath. Reminding yourself that you can relax completely, just for now. Inside this timeless moment of right now. There is nothing you need to do and nothing you need to worry about. Any unfinished business in the 'to-do' department will easily wait for you on the other side of this breathing break. "Both physically..." you say as you send an internal crew of awareness on a search and observe mission throughout your body, making note of what all you feel without judgment. Noticing where there might be a tension or a tightness or urge to smoke or any particular comfort or pain and just breathe into that part with awareness and permission to let it be and relax deeper into that cocoon of calm, kind of melting and releasing anything you don't need to hold onto, the way butter does or stiff noodles do when they drop into a pot of boiling water. "And mentally" is the final phrase of the 4 part sentence that you say to yourself from deeper and deeper inside this core of calm on the next exhale. Just what is 'mental relaxation? It's not stopping thoughts. Rather it is the purposeful observation of thoughts that you let come and go past the reviewing station of your conscious mind, as if they were on parade. In fact, you might like to remember sitting beside a river you might have come upon and remember that

attitude of dispassionate, detached observer who is content to suspend judgment and just bring awareness, noticing first the current itself and how it is incessantly coming and going. Just like the breath. Just like the life force that is breathing you. And with it the constant flow of your own thoughts generated by your unconscious and paraded past your conscious mind: observing the flow of the river of your own thoughts as they make their way past the conscious mind. Not trying to stop them or change them or fix anything, just letting them come and watching them go, just like a breath.

And back around through the sentence again and again, 'I am completely relaxed, at this time, both physically and mentally,' using your own inner voice at your own chosen speed and noticing how with each repetition it becomes more true. You begin to know that you like this focused breathing much better than what you used to get only through smoking. You begin to know – in little glimpses and glimmers - that it's going to be a LOT of fun to be a NON-smoker. And you're very close – closer than you've ever been. You're on the brink of a massive change that will sweep through your entire experience of being yourself. But first you may have some forgiving and remembering and accepting of yourself to do. And letting go. And of course you are working on it all, all the time, in the spirit of compassion. It's a great turning point in your life. Breathing consciously into this business of saying goodbye to the sacred contract smoking has occupied in your life – up until now.

But first, let's dip into your Experience Savings & Loan account and borrow some good feelings from your past and future. As you breathe yourself up and down here in the wellspring of wellbeing power place, it's easy to slide the way back time machine all the way back to the time before you ever smoked when you experienced nothing except the profound exuberance of just existing and being alive. You may not even have known that you could remember having this feeling. Until NOW when you realize you suddenly ARE remembering something you didn't even know you had forgotten. So feel it now. And memorize it now while you let yourself breathe yourself deeper into that you, back then, as if it was now. Because, really, isn't everything important about life exactly the same after all? Isn't Life on a Sunday afternoon at Twilight pretty much the same as it surely was in 19 hundred and whatever it was when you were four years old or sometime before the age of starting school? Back when you were blissfully naive and oblivious to indoctrinations that certainly were to follow but that, for now, you haven't even heard yet in this version of yourself. Just back to when you are tuned in so good – in your essential groove of feeling your feelings, present in each moment, breathing easy, peaceful and calm, accepting yourself so completely you aren't even conscious that there is ever anything else. So have the good feeling with your conscious mind remembering it while you direct your unconscious to go ahead and memorize it, each and every nuance of it as you just settle in to that experience and let it feel real good, way down deep, noting that your sense of comfort increases with each breath.

Then, when you really feel one with that you from the past, really having that experience, you just get a good strong grip on it and click here to DRAG it ALL the way back into right now – a nice present for the present time when you could really use an experience like that! So accept it by really breathing it consciously into the NOW.

OR, you might enjoy going straight into the future when you're going to be a completely contented NON smoker and recognize that there, deep comfort will have become so routine to you a long time ago, that you can harvest abundant stores of comfort and joy and habitual well being from this well invested Experience Savings & Loan any time you want to. No part of you is likely to object if you should borrow against this good feeling you have so abundantly in the future. You can transfer it back to the present and call it a present, with good interest.

And really hold on to all of these good feelings, recognizing that it doesn't matter whether you got them from the past or the future, you've always had them all along. You know how to have these feelings. They are your feelings, by virtue of being alive. Feeling how good it feels to intentionally transmit the message of acceptance to yourself – right now, just as you are: I accept you unconditionally, right now. And just let it in. Deeper with every breath. There really is no need to fix, stop, or change anything about who you are. Simply celebrate your wholeness. I am not perfect but I am whole. It has a nice ring to it. And it's okay to go ahead on into your life getting better and greater all the time, so long as you know that you are exactly alright, right now, just as you are, no matter what your inner critics might be screaming about right now. Accept them too, while you're at it. They are, after all, only trying to help you with their good, protective (though misguided) interest in your wellbeing. They do care about you in their funny little way. At any rate, accepting them shuts them up in a hurry and they go off to sulk somewhere. You can even afford to be compassionate towards them.

And here we still are – again - with you still having the good feelings that become a mainstay of your core experience, deeper with every breath. And the more those feelings deepen, there is the discovery of a confidence that begins to manifest with all kinds of unprecedented acts of heroic courage such that you find yourself saying what needs to be said, speaking your truth with kindness, but holding nothing back. Discovering and accepting into the fold facets and aspects of you that have waited a long time, yearning for inclusion. It might be necessary to grieve for the great energy that's been spent to hide, ignore and even villainize them. As though they were an enemy or threat somehow. As if all parts aren't sacred and essential to your wholeness. But for some unexplained reason, suddenly, all that shaming and judging and hiding and fear is over and you see that you really are perfect in this moment, all parts included. You suddenly KNOW that you've got that going for you. Luxuriate in this moment, exactly how it is, no matter how the mind might think it is eager for something better, later, there, then – as opposed to 'be here now' just as you are, perfect in your glimmers of wholeness.

A Jungian dream analyst described his own personal journey with a recurring dream in which he is walking down a city street, in a bit of a hurry but very well organized, smartly dressed, clean, organized, and on his way to an important meeting where he will be well received and respected. However, his wellbeing always seems threatened and his contentment is disturbed in each dream by his growing awareness and alarm that he is being pursued by a beastly creature who stays relentlessly on his trail. The creature is horrible! In every dream, the man quickens his step and tries to escape the ugly,

uncivilized, smelly, dangerous, evil thing. It is no use. Finally, one night, the man has suddenly had enough and he stops in his tracks and swirls around to confront the beast, loudly demanding to know 'what do you want from me??' Of course, the beast provides the now obvious news that 'I AM you – and I want IN.' The man never had the dream again.

So go ahead and realize your wholeness even while you put the spotlight on to observe the warring factions, both you, in conflict with one another, each very badly wanting something very different: to smoke and to not smoke. You get to be okay with both aspects of yourself and each somehow accepts the other. And the more you're able to have a third observing self, a neutral self, the more you are not influenced by the desires of either of the parties. And the more you are able to be non-reactionary, the more you are becoming able to accept and be okay with all aspects of who you are and what you feel. You no longer participate in the struggle between the two parts in conflict. Just observe the 'good you' as it tries to control the 'naughty you' and the naughty part won't want to be controlled when it wants to smoke cigarettes. Eternally, they oppose each other, fighting, locked in a struggle, reacting to each other reactively. When caught in the middle, of course you can't see outside the walls, but stepping back, your consciousness is no longer consumed by the conflict. It's suddenly easy to somehow be above it all, a dispassionate observer, a part of but also apart from, a beautiful dissociation to observe from clearly. You just be with the conflict as if you are comfortably watching a tennis match. Maybe this match takes place in a bit of a lightning storm and insights strike like lightning does: You can suddenly see the inherent logic in why you might feel fear and panic and depression when you first try not to smoke because you have smoked in a futile attempt to keep feelings of fear and panic and depression at bay. So of course, a part of you might randomly and loudly proclaim: I WANT A CIGARETTE!! But you listen for and hear the corresponding part that says: Or do I? The answer is simultaneously Yes I do and also I don't. And you just watch with curiosity and note the drift of awareness.

And from the comfortable vantage point of self acceptance, you can watch, with utmost compassion, as the buffer is dismantled and you are free to feel any uncomfortable feelings and accept any uncomfortable ideas. And you find that it is possible to take a fresh look at any sense of shortcomings and faults from your previous life and know that everything's coming back up for your thoughtful reinterpretation, acceptance, forgiveness, and even celebration. You watch with a new curiosity and see how Fear and Embarrassment about shortcomings, real or imagined that used to signal a need to smoke, now illuminate new understandings and options. It's as if you see your whole life passing in front of you, as people describe in near death experiences, but in this near life experience, you see what they report: that suddenly you understand everything. You get how everything had to happen exactly as it did for you to be here now. You recognize as obsolete that primitive habit of comparing yourself to other people and finding yourself wanting – not good enough. You just let it go and are filled with a wondrous sense of knowing that this is actually who you are. You don't have to be as brave or brilliant or strong or creative or carefree as all kinds of people you admire. I accept you unconditionally right now! And notice that the acceptance seeps down a bit deeper with every mindful repetition.

Know that you have come to a place where you realize it is solely and completely your choice whether to smoke or not and no part of you has to rebel against anybody else or denounce any part of yourself. You are breathing yourself into a place where you can accept yourself equally, knowing that you are not a bad person no matter what you choose. Notice how easily the inner war ends and free choice becomes possible. And you simply ponder the question: Who am I now and what do I want? Maybe your personal list of immediate reasons why you want to stop parades past your conscious mind while your unconscious goes about generating ideas about what you want to do instead with all the freed up time, taste, money, and energy as this tide turns. What is your soul thirsty for? What will fill your cup? Continue to meditate on that question in one part of your heart even while you turn your conscious attention to other matters. But like a three ring circus, the act continues in one ring even as the spotlight shifts and your attention becomes riveted on lions jumping through the dramatically flaming rings of fire in the next arena.

So, let your attention be fixated on a reflection device you bring to mind, perhaps an elaborate golden gilded mirror arrangement like you might find in a high end department store: a center panel and angled panels that create the illusion of infinity selves going off to the left and right of the center panel. Begin this meditation by stepping up to the center panel and really looking yourself deep in the eyes and compassionately reiterating that self acceptance message. And looking to the left, imagine that the progression of selves is getting younger and younger, by the minute or hour or day or week or month, year, or decade, all the way back until there at the farthest end you see your baby self making its entrance onto the planet. It's very satisfying to unleash a wash of acceptance to all those parts that the you in the center panel of right now is enjoying right now. I like to imagine a hose filled with an infinite supply of cosmic, hydrogen peroxide bubbles of acceptance that you let flow through the whole lineup of selves, all the way back to that baby you. Maybe you'd like to materialize at your own birth, much like a spiritual midwife, catching yourself and beholding the miracle and wonder of who you are: welcoming yourself to life, celebrating your worth... and perhaps orienting that baby you to the luck of the draw, delivering the good news and the bad news, bracing yourself to what's ahead, giving the inside understanding about what to expect from the parents who are doing the best they can but are woefully limited with regard to the task of properly revering you. After all, they are caught up in their own dramas and challenges. You may be drawn to 'visit' with various ages and stages of yourself that you can see pulsating with an inordinate energy. They've waited a long time for you from their future to come back and assist them with any unfinished business. Visit previously scared and isolated, possibly despairing parts and give them new permissions and reassurance. Let them know how much you treasure their worth and persuade them that you can be trusted to know what their hearts desire. Give them your strongest permission to have needs and say so. And again, this inner healing continues around the clock in its own ring of the circus even while you go on to think about other things.

For instance, you direct your conscious attention back to the center panel where your current self gazes back at you and suddenly remember that off to the right march the progression of selves heading into the future where, among other things, you're going to

be a non smoker. It might be nice to jump ahead in time to a place where you are already enjoying the wide range of perks of smoke out that you are currently anticipating so fondly. Go far enough ahead where you know the body and lungs have completely recovered from the previous ravages of smoking. And then zoom in with x-ray technology to take a good look at the delightfully pristine pink lungs characteristic of someone who has never smoked. Take a deep drag of that satisfaction and memorize that refreshing feeling.

And from that spot in the future, let's remember back and review the process - from the day you were first listening to these instructions, back at that time when you had finally decided to divorce the sacred smoking relationship. It's as if you can set up a projection room with a screen that reveals the zoomed in close up of the crusted over blackened lungs. You will want to watch with particular appreciation the incredible impact of each and every cleansing breath you take. In fact, you can visualize the breath entering the nose and moving through the throat and swirling into the lungs as a white, laser like, high intensity light that sears and cleanses and heals - ever so gradually of course - so gradual that it's almost imperceptible to the naked eye. But in this special way of viewing, you're not limited to what the naked eye can see. You can set up a virtual reality viewing arrangement where in this projection room you can take advantage of time lapse photography such that you are suddenly able to see that your lungs from yesteryear are decidedly clearing, making definitive progress with each breath. Perhaps just a lighter black at first, and then the unmistakable appearance of grey stripes appearing in the blackness which then fades to grey which continues to pale to reveal the first pinkish stripes which are the early indicators of the glorious pristine pink that is on the way, as pink as the day they were born.

I enjoyed watching a similar and particularly spectacular transformation brought to me through the magic of time lapse photography on the Learning Channel one day. It depicted at first a barren and parched desert that, unbeknownst even to itself, in fact contained billions of dormant, seemingly dead seeds which had been buried for decades, just waiting, not even knowing that their genetic potential was in tact, but still waiting for the drenching rains that one day finally come and they WAKE UP and ever so gradually but dramatically that barren, crusted over landscape transforms into a lush and blazingly colorful paradise. In the beginning, you can only see the life giving water penetrating the hard earth and causing the seeds of change to swell up, open their casings, send out rootlets, and the first green shoots that appear suddenly above ground, as if the earth was boiling. In the next frames, the entire horizon is ablaze with waves of flowers dancing in the breezes - embraced and kissed with the breath of life.

But back to your viewing room where you have already breathed at least ten more high intensity, laser like white breaths, that even while you might have forgotten to watch, were swirling through your lungs and exchanging the old and stale and replacing it with new and fresh. And just as the life force continues to breathe you even when you forget to keep your attention on it, so too this cleansing operation goes on around the clock with every breath you take and you can tune in and appreciate the progress any time you wish. And you might like to quickly extend and stretch your vision all the way to the farthest

end of the progression of selves getting older until you behold the oldest, wisest you you're ever going to become. That evolved self who may be more light and energy than matter, a self who twinkles with delight when you show up for a visit. You may have questions to ask and reassurance to receive from this wise old self who has been a non smoker so long now that he or she may need some prompting to even remember that there was once this smoking era that long since resolved into choosing life with each breath. Together, you might review the whole lifetime of selves progressing. Understanding everything, feeling very good all up and down the line, no matter which timeless moment you happen to be experiencing now.

And of course you are always able to breathe yourself almost instantly into this power spot you enjoy and memorize right now. It's as easy as wanting to. The neural pathway has already been created and even as you exit this trance, you deepen it further. It's just like that process that occurs when a child discovers a particularly powerful place and make the command decision to declare it an official 'hide-out', a place where you feel very good and feel your power. When you first find it, you soak up all those good feelings and marvel at your luck in finding such a good place. Then you realize it might be more fun still if you had a blanket in here. So you run up to the house and get one and scurry it back inside to feather the nest. That's good but now you want some snacks, or water, or friends and so you run back and forth all day, not even realizing that you are creating and deepening the path to this power spot until finally you are so familiar with this path that you can easily find your way back any time you want to be there. So, you emerge from this trance as if waking up from a deep dream, perhaps reluctantly because it feels so good here. But you can easily come back any time, perhaps alerted to do so at any urge to smoke. Finding that you are able to ride the elevator of any breath that you put your attention on, stop, drop and roll style. Rolling your awareness inside. But at this time, stepping on the breath elevator from deep inside the inner sanctum and simply riding it back to the level of here and now.