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Enough! A Buddhist Approach to Finding Release from Addictive Patterns

Chönyi Taylor
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“We are all addicted, to a greater or lesser degree, to something,” Chönyi Taylor writes in her work on breaking addictive habits. “The most insidious addiction is not drug related, but our addiction to our own self-pity and small mindedness. If this book helps anyone, even a little, then I have achieved my aim.”

Taylor not only reaches her goal, but goes far beyond it, adding a vital guidebook to the literature on both addiction and Buddhist philosophy. Even those who don’t think they’re addicted to any toxic substances or behaviors will find much to contemplate with Taylor’s guidance. As she notes, addiction isn’t just about drinking, smoking, drug use, or gambling, but rather, it centers around certain patterns of behavior. Someone could be addicted to arguing, for example, or to overspending or even self-criticism.

Examining the mechanisms of these behaviors is crucial to finding the triggers that set off the addiction trap, she notes. When an individual can disarm the automatic response that might occur, it’s like taking the bullets out of a gun. She writes, “The bullets, in this case, are ways in which we react to the different triggers. The finger that pulls the trigger is an unconscious thought or habit. We begin by uncovering the triggers and then we have the possibility of unlocking the automatic reaction.”

Taylor folds Buddhism into the process artfully, creating a step-by-step approach to mindfulness that incorporates the philosophy’s blend of both gentle acceptance and radical transformation. Buddhist practice depends heavily on mindfulness and conscious acknowledgement of the present moment; for someone who’s addicted, creating this discipline can circumvent the automatic, unconscious responses that tend to keep the addiction going.

Ordained as a Buddhist nun by the Dalai Lama in 1995, Taylor now teaches Buddhism at many conferences and workshops. As a retired psychotherapist, Taylor brings together the perspectives of Western psychology and Eastern philosophy; her skill in finding similarities and points of intersection strengthen the work and makes this a stunningly valuable guide for changing addictive behaviors.

Much like her trigger-and-bullet analogy, Taylor’s explanations are straightforward, and often conjure strong images. Although her tone is friendly, it’s also sharp and crisp, like an advisor who feels a responsibility to be absolutely honest without pulling any punches. Even the book’s title is an urgent directive, and that kind of no-nonsense style works exceedingly well in delivering the message that addiction and addictive habits can be undone.
ELIZABETH MILLARD (July / August 2010)

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