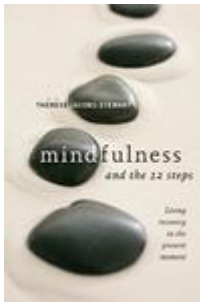


## Stepping Mindfully Into Recovery From Addictions

A review of



### **Mindfulness and the 12 Steps: Living Recovery in the Present Moment**

by Thérèse Jacobs-Stewart

Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2010. 181 pp. ISBN 978-1-59285-820-0.

\$14.95, paperback



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Reviewed by

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Working with addicted individuals is both a challenge and a great reward. A common means for facilitating good treatment outcomes is to encourage participation in a 12-Step program (Marlatt et al., 2004). Since 1935 this approach has helped countless thousands of individuals come to grips with their addiction and to develop cognitive and behavioral strengths to live a life abstinent from addictive substances.

Many people in the grips of an addiction adamantly refuse to even consider participation in the program. They give many reasons: It is too religious, and they do not believe in God; they don't want to listen to other people telling their stories; they don't need to be in a group to recover, and so forth. The skillful clinician needs to be able to listen to these objections and work with them rather than create further resistance by insisting on participation as a condition of treatment. When the patient's objections are heard and used to

enhance motivation, it may be the case that varying the presentation of the 12 Steps will work more effectively for the individual.

In *Mindfulness and the 12 Steps: Living Recovery in the Present Moment*, Jacobs-Stewart describes one alternative way of working through the 12 Steps that will be helpful to some. Using principles drawn from Buddhism and emphasizing the use of mindfulness tools, she skillfully illustrates how the two systems may be used to build on each other and contribute to an individual's psychological growth. Mindfulness has been effective for a number of psychological problems, including addictions (Epstein, 1996; Marlatt, 2002). It shares a number of elements in common with cognitive-behavioral therapy and emphasizes ways of recognizing how one's life has become constricted through patterns of thoughts and behavior.

Early on in her book, the author also mentions the utility of the Ignatian spiritual exercises as another way of working with the 12 Steps. Although she does not develop this discussion, excellent resources are available for those who may be interested (Fitzgerald, 1995; Harbaugh, 1997). It is unfortunate that Jacobs-Stewart does not work more with these exercises because the elements of the Eastern approach she describes are very much compatible with the Ignatian approach. This would have detracted from her basic presentation, however, and her mention of this other system serves as a reminder that there are a number of ways of working with the 12 Steps that can be useful in meeting patient resistance.

This straightforward book includes numerous personal anecdotes that will be helpful to a reader. Each chapter progresses through the 12 Steps and at the end includes mindfulness exercises for the reader to practice as he or she works that particular step; as with any effort to change behavior, it is important to do the work and not simply to read about it. Her exercises are well chosen, and they will also be more useful when the patient is assisted by a skillful clinician or a sponsor familiar with mindfulness training who is able to both guide and encourage the patient.

There are a number of strengths to *Mindfulness and the 12 Steps*. It is written clearly, with numerous personal examples and anecdotes. This makes it an accessible guidebook for many who are recovering from an addiction. It is spiritually focused, not just through the inclusion of the Buddhist principles but also with the author's thoughts and experiences as a Roman Catholic.

Often the objections that a patient expresses about the spiritual aspect of 12-Step work show some confusion between spirituality and religiosity. Spirituality is best understood as a search for the sacred as part of developing an understanding of human existence. Religion is an organized means for facilitating the attainment of a spiritual life (Marlatt et al., 2004). The author's personal experiences help the reader to understand that there is a growth dimension to spirituality and that this is more than adherence to a religious membership. To read of another's struggles with spirituality and how these were addressed will be helpful to

the addicted reader who is struggling with the spiritual aspects of the 12-Step program and looking for guidance.

The author also helps the reader appreciate the importance of community in practicing mindfulness and developing psychological strength. Many people in recovery object to being in a group setting, and she illustrates the value of such participation throughout the book. Resistance is an early barrier to recovery from addictive substances, and Jacobs-Stewart provides exercises, examples, and gentle persuasion to help the reader examine this in the context of his or her own life and begin to push past it.

Addictions continue to be a significant health problem in the United States, as they are in many other parts of the world. *Mindfulness and the 12 Steps* is one more tool that can be used to help an individual develop the cognitive and behavioral strengths to overcome an addiction and to construct a comfortable sobriety that will lead to lifelong abstinence.

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