

Four Steps to Nirvana

1) Start with a single sentence

If you want to know what seeds to plant in your garden, you need to know what you want to grow in the first place. If you want watermelons, you need to plant watermelon seeds. So first we have to be very clear on what we want.

When planting mental seeds to destroy a particular negative emotion, it's important to work just on our number one, and not get too spread out. Plant the watermelons, and then after that plant the corn. Don't try to do both at the same time.

The first step is to try to express what you want to do in a single, simple sentence. For example, *I want to stop my addiction to coffee.*

2) Plan who to help

Seeds can only be planted with someone else; just as we can only plant seeds in our garden if we have soil in which to place them. The way to plant a seed to stop our own worst negative emotion is to help someone else stop the same emotion. So I have to start looking for someone who has a problem with some addiction of their own.

Taking this person out for coffee to help them work on their challenge plants the seeds, but *planning* who to take out, when to take them, and what to do when I take them out plants a lot more seeds even than the

taking out itself, because I'm thinking about them all the time, and thinking is the most powerful way to plant seeds. Spend a lot of time thinking about who you're going to help to stop the emotion you dream of stopping—that's Step Two.

3) Go to Starbucks, and see the ripples

So our own challenge is an addiction to coffee. We'll plant a seed for stopping this by helping someone else stop a similar addiction. Don't sit and worry about which tea to start drinking, or how to avoid the coffee pot at work. Just plant the seeds, and then the best thing to do will come on its own.

Step Two is to pick the person we're going to help, and to think up ways to help them. Step Three is to actually take them out somewhere—say, to Starbucks (for an herbal tea!)—and to sit with them and talk about ways that you can think of that will help them stop some addiction that they have.

Now there's an important point here. Helping someone else stop an addiction just so I can stop one of my own is a pretty selfish thing to do! We need to change the dynamic here so that we don't just end up creating two seeds: one to stop an addiction and one to create a lot of people around us who are selfish. How do we make the seed at Step Three something that helps the whole world?

This gets into what the Buddhist tradition calls "bodhichitta," which literally translates as "Buddha Mind." It's a vision of a world that is perfect, and a feeling of how we could help make it that way.

There's a very simple trick we can use during Step Three to make sure it's laced with Buddha Mind. Think to yourself: "Okay. I'm trying something new. Instead of trying all the normal things that people try to stop an

addiction to coffee, I'm going to try this new karmic seed thing. If it works, I'll be free of a serious addiction that I've had for quite a long time.

"My friends know that I've been trying to overcome this addiction for years, and they're going to be really curious about what I did this time to succeed so quickly and surely. I'll tell them about the seeds and about the taking-someone-to-Starbucks thing, and then some of them will try it themselves.

"Those who do will overcome their own addiction, and then *their* friends will ask them how they managed it. In time, there might be a chain of like a thousand people that starts with me...and a thousand people out looking for someone else to help with their addiction problem.

"I might even...change the world! Help make it a perfect place!"

That's bodhichitta, the real thing, in action. And it changes a selfish Step Three into an ultimately compassionate one.

4) Lay down on your bed & stare at the ceiling

It's not unusual for me to give a talk somewhere to a bunch of people, and have someone raise their hand and say, "I've been helping people get work on their addictions for years, but it didn't do anything at all about my coffee addiction."

You were making good seeds, for sure. Think though of a watermelon seed which is perfectly good—but we throw it on the sidewalk instead of planting it in the ground. Or it does get into the ground, but doesn't get water, or sunlight, or nourishment. The seed might even open, but it will be stillborn—just a tiny sprout that doesn't go anywhere, doesn't produce fruit.

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The Four Steps are like the water & sunlight and the rest. These are “mental seed farming technique,” and if we use all four then our seeds will grow strong and fast. And Step Four is the most important of all.

We are trained to think of meditation as something that we do on the floor with crossed legs and a straight back. But let’s face it—some of the best meditation you ever did in your life was in high school, leaning back on your bed, staring off towards the ceiling, completely engrossed in a daydream about your girlfriend or boyfriend. In Step Four, we want to try to reach that same completely-engrossed daydream.

So when you come home after helping the person who has a challenge with their own addiction, then fix dinner, eat it, clean up, take your bath, (watch a *little* TV or do a *few* emails if that’s what you need to do), and then get into your nightclothes. Sit down on your bed halfway lying down, propped up on your shoulder, and stare off at the ceiling, eyes unfocused, just the way you did in high school.

Take a little review of your Negative Emotion Destruction Project. Go over all the details of how you made your plan to find a person who had a similar addiction (Step Two), then go over all the details of your meeting with them (Step Three). It’s **very important** to review carefully how, during Step Three, you gave some thought to the chain reaction you’re going to set in motion if you do defeat your own addiction by using this new system, and all your friends start doing the same: bodhichitta.

Remember that seeds are planted inside the mind. We plant seeds by what we say, and by what we do, but only because we are mentally aware of ourselves while we talk or act. It takes thought to get seeds into the mind.

During Step Four, we are taking advantage of the fact that—when we *think*—we are planting seeds directly into the core of the mind. We plant a lot of seeds at Starbucks, sitting with our friend and giving them support—

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but we plant a lot more seeds during Step Two and Step Four, just *thinking* about this person, and how we're going to help them.

This is the whole difference between planting random seeds by helping people here and there; and seeing a new un-addicted life pop out of a seed that we've watered and fertilized with all four steps. If you learn the Four Steps well, then you can be **a real help** to all the people in your life.