

AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO STOP SMOKING

INTRODUCTION

This book is about more than just 'stopping smoking'. It's about taking charge of your life and learning how to heal and resolve the inner conflicts underlying destructive behaviour.

I started working with smokers wanting to become non-smokers in the late 1980s. People who are happy to continue smoking don't seek help, and neither do those who have been able to simply stop when they wanted to. I see those whose smoking is a continuing problem in their lives. I still remember the young man who came to see me in 1989, and sat in my office sobbing his heart out: his young child had asthma, exacerbated by her father's smoking, and his wife disliked the smell and resented what she perceived as his selfishness in persisting in smoking despite his family's needs. His marriage was in jeopardy and he was desperate to stop – but he could not stop. His internal conflict and confusion had brought him to despair.

In those days I was using acupuncture and counselling to help smokers, with some success; but I wasn't able to help that young man, and I regret not having had more insight into what was driving his internal conflict and confusion, and more methods to offer him so that he could resolve it. I've learned a lot since then and I want to share with you now the fruits of those years of experience.

Just take a moment to consider a question.

What would it be like to wake up one morning free of the compulsion to smoke?

Would it be like being relieved of a burden? Light replacing darkness? A release of tension? Peace? Liberation? Escaping from a cage? Or would it be just the simplest thing in the world – a return to normality? However you might experience it and whatever metaphors you may prefer to describe it, the knowledge that you had stopped smoking forever would be a cause for rejoicing, wouldn't it?

But perhaps you noticed a little cold shiver of doubt and unease that manifested in response to the question. If you really believed that to become a non-smoker would be so wonderful, what could possibly have stopped you from doing it long ago? Why have you and so many others found it so difficult to stop smoking?

Some smokers ascribe their difficulty to the chemically addictive quality of the nicotine in cigarettes; others accuse themselves of lacking willpower. In both instances there is a tendency to ascribe blame and to give up responsibility.

I'm interested in the psychology of smoking, especially why people continue to do it even when they want to stop. I remember going to visit someone in hospital during the winter a few years ago, and being shocked to see the little army of invalids at the door, shivering in their pyjamas and dressing gowns, some in wheelchairs, some dragging drip stands behind them, some coughing and wheezing, all puffing away on cigarettes. I couldn't believe my eyes: what on earth was going on? Imagine the outrage if hospitals forced sick people out of their beds, made them stand outside in the freezing wind, and obliged them to inhale carcinogenic smoke! Yet here were these people apparently choosing to do exactly that!

So why would they do it? Rather than settling for blaming 'addiction' or 'weak will', I prefer to look a bit deeper. The most elementary introspection shows our minds to be complicated processes, changing all the time and made up of many parts, rather than single stable entities. Sometimes there can be a conflict between two or more parts of the psyche, as reflected in everyday speech when somebody says: 'Part of me wants to do *this* but another part wants to do *that*, so I don't know what to do!' It seems reasonable to think that different parts of ourselves would have our wellbeing at heart; however it's only too evident that they can have different ideas of how to go about achieving it.

This raises an interesting idea: maybe there's a good motivation underlying even those drives and desires that manifest in destructive behaviours – those things we find ourselves doing although we don't want to do them. And if that's so, then some kind of inner conflict resolution may be effective in changing unwanted behaviour. Instead of

lurching from the extreme of indulgence to the extreme of repression or denial, perhaps accompanied by either self-justification or guilt, with the 'good' part beating up the 'bad' part and the 'bad' part rebelling, why not look for a third or middle way that avoids these extremes? With a little introspection and an attitude of kindness and interested enquiry, perhaps we can discover the positive intentions and also find some constructive ways to fulfil them.

Over years of working with smokers and others wishing to change unwanted behaviour, I've been developing methods to bring about a profound resolution of inner conflict. Drawing on nearly 30 years of personal experience of studying and practising the sophisticated systems of practical psychology to be found in Vajrayana Buddhism, and adding the mind-technologies of modern therapies and coaching methods, particularly NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming), I've put together a simple and effective step-by-step path for healing the inner conflict that characterises persistent smoking. I've seen my success rate rocket as I'm now able to help desperate, compulsive smokers – people like that young man whose marriage was at risk due to his smoking back in 1989. I wish I had known then what I know now, so that I could have helped him too.

I call my way the natural mind method: with no coercion, no drugs, no artificial anything, it's simply a way for people to learn how to find and bring out the best in themselves. Rather than tying up energy pitting one part of the mind in a battle against another part, the natural mind method frees up energy as the parts of the psyche learn to work together for a common purpose: your wellbeing! Not only can people stop smoking, easily and happily, they can learn how to find peace in a mind that is freed from internal struggle and invigorated with renewed enthusiasm and confidence to apply to life.

Let's take a moment to consider some of the many ways in which people try to stop smoking.

Good old-fashioned willpower works for many people; but it doesn't suit everyone. And even when it does work, it's usually at a cost. The willpower way involves pitting the 'goodie' part of your mind versus the 'baddie' part, which works fine if the smoking part is quite weak and gives up without a fight. The problem arises when a determined smoking part fights back, and the internal struggle familiar to so many serial stop-smokers ensues. The battle ties up energy, leaving you tired and often dispirited as you strive to suppress a desire that keeps resurfacing – and this can go on for literally years.

Listening to the sensible persuasion of others, gathering information, and applying your own logic and reason in support of your decision to stop, can all be very helpful in supporting the willpower method. But, if you're still boosting the goodie in order to suppress the baddie, it remains essentially a somewhat aggressive approach; and as the baddie is left unsatisfied so you will be left with a sense of 'something missing'. That 'something missing' is what people are referring to when they talk about 'giving up' smoking. There is a kind of wistfulness about that expression, a sense of sacrifice, a lingering regret – because you are denying a part of yourself the fulfilment it has been seeking through smoking, and not replacing it with anything else. After a while, the sense of loss will diminish, but there is a cost to you and your integrity.

Hypnotherapy has helped many people and if it works for you, that's great. But if not, what to do? You are largely reliant on the skill of the therapist, and if that doesn't do the trick, you're back to square one again. And, if you are someone who likes to be in control of what's going on, and likes to learn things to apply elsewhere in your life, you may find the relative passivity of the process unsatisfying.

Acupuncture for smoking cessation was in vogue some years ago; perhaps less so nowadays. I used to use it, combined with counselling, and had some success with it. However, I find that while it can help to alleviate the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal, and also reduce the anxiety that so often underlies and exacerbates the desire to smoke, it does nothing to help you learn more effective ways of being and behaving. As with hypnotherapy, it's rather passive, encouraging you to rely on the therapist rather than taking responsibility for your own actions – which means that, if it doesn't work, what do you do next?

Drug therapy is the first port of call for many people today, much promoted by the NHS (and, of course, the pharmaceutical companies). It includes various kinds of nicotine replacements and also the prescription drug, Zyban. While the success rates for nicotine replacement on its own are not encouraging, the support offered by NHS stop-smoking groups can be helpful; in fact I rather suspect it's that which is the real aid, not the drugs.

Bioresonance therapy has recently become available in the UK and is claiming a high success rate. It involves being wired up with electrodes to a machine that goes 'ping'. The machine, called a Bicom, is said to re-align your body's electromagnetic frequency so that it reverts to the frequency of a non-smoker. It's another rather passive process which does not promote any learning on your part.

Self-help books by stop-smoking specialists can be very useful. They encourage you to reflect on what's going on, and the insights you gain into your own psychological processes can be enough to enable you to stop. However, I have yet to find a stop-smoking book that really addresses the issue of inner conflict and offers fulfilling ways to resolve it; most of them present more or less sophisticated variations of boosting the goodie part and suppressing the baddie part.

Of course, some fortunate people just stop smoking effortlessly, when the time is right for them. They are unlikely to be reading this book! You may be hoping that one day you too will just spontaneously wake up as a non-smoker. But can you afford to wait and see? Are you going to wait until you are a coughing, wheezing pensioner, still hoping for a miracle?

With the natural mind method, you take charge of your mind and your life as you learn how to resolve issues, not suppress them. Not only can you stop smoking, you can actually enjoy the process as you find better ways to fulfil your needs. You can be creative with the techniques I teach you, adapting them to suit yourself and applying them elsewhere in your life. Just a little observation and introspection is enough to notice a basic fact of human life: it is characterised by desire or craving – the persistent itch of wanting something else, something other, of wanting to change the way you feel, to find fulfilment, to fill a void, soothe a dissatisfaction, pacify anxiety, or create excitement or distraction. The craving for a cigarette is just one of countless manifestations of that underlying, existential itch. If you think of that little voice of desire as a messenger crying out for attention, then you can see that most methods of stopping smoking are attempts to shoot the messenger. My method answers the cry for help – and that's why it works.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I encourage you to take charge of the material you will find in this book and use it in whatever ways you find most helpful to you personally. The exercises are practical: you have to do them, not just read about them! Reading about them will not get the same results as actually doing them. It's a bit like the difference between reading a travel brochure and actually going on holiday and enjoying the benefits of taking a break.

I urge you to experiment with all the ideas and exercises you find here. You may find some more helpful than others, but I guarantee you will learn something from everything, even if it's only that a particular idea or technique doesn't suit you! It's fine to use your faculty of discernment and decide to leave something 'on the shelf' for the present, but do try it out first; sometimes we learn the most from the things that stretch us, that move us beyond the limits of what's familiar. Bring a playful, enquiring attitude to the ideas and the exercises, and allow yourself to enjoy exploring something new. Take responsibility for the way you work with the material and for the results you get.

We all have beliefs about ourselves and the world and these beliefs exert a powerful influence on our lives, for varying degrees of good or ill. We will be working with cultivating constructive beliefs later on in the book; meanwhile you need to generate enough of a positive attitude right now to enable you to get started. While this isn't the place to discuss the relative validity of different beliefs, I would like to raise a simple question: how would it be to act 'as if' you believed something that you found inspiring rather than 'as if' you believed something you found limiting or dispiriting? For example, what difference would it make to your life if you were to act 'as if' you believed that you were capable of change for good, and that you already had within the deeper levels of your being all the qualities and resources you need to make that change? Contrast that with acting 'as if' you believed that you were doomed to endlessly repeat habitual behaviours, just programmed to go round and round in circles like a little hamster running round a wheel? You might like

to experiment by trying various 'as if' possibilities along these lines, and noticing the differences in how you might feel and act in the world.

The material in this book is drawn from NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) and Buddhism. Originating in America in the 1970s, NLP is a system of applied psychology which originated from an enquiry into human potential and how people do what they do when they do it well. NLP offers ways of analysing how you perceive your world and operate within it, and presents entertaining methods for changing habitual ways of thinking, communicating, and acting. It promotes rapid learning, lateral thinking, creativity, imagination, and humour, with the aim of enabling you to find more effective ways of doing things. Buddhism offers a number of profound conceptual frameworks for observing the mind and the way it works, while meditation practice develops mental and emotional stability and wellbeing, allowing the natural qualities of love, strength, intelligence and understanding to manifest more strongly. Both NLP and Buddhism share the very simple basic premise that it's a good idea to do whatever you can to bring out the best in yourself and to help others do likewise. Together they will give you a range of vastly more effective ways to respond to the messenger of your smoking than shooting it!

People have differing preferences for how they tackle an interactive book like this. Some people – and I'm one of them – like to whiz through it very quickly, to get a sense of the overall picture of where it's leading, then go back to the beginning and go through it again thoroughly, doing the exercises carefully. Others start as they mean to continue: steadily and thoroughly, step by step from page one. Whatever you do, I recommend that once you embark on the exercises, you practise them in their proper sequence. This is because many of them build on what you've learned in a previous exercise, and if you jump about you will miss essential building blocks.

While it's completely possible for you to work through the exercises on your own, and the book is designed exactly for that purpose, it can be more fun if you can get someone else to help you. It helps to have someone to discuss things with, to coach you through the instructions, and also to write notes for you. Several of the exercises require you to make notes, and I strongly recommend you to keep a file or large notebook for them; much of what you learn will be transferable, not just pertaining to your stopping smoking, and your notebook can form a useful manual for future reference.

A word of warning to those who may have perfectionist tendencies: don't let them get in your way. You know the sort of thing: 'Well, I want to do it properly, so that means I shall have to set aside some really long blocks of time when I can be undisturbed, and I'll have to find someone suitable to coach me, and, oh, then I'll need a tape recorder, and I'd better buy a new notebook and a nice pen, and perhaps I really should wait until I'm less busy at work / have got a new job / the children are at school / the children are on holiday / the children have left school / the children have left home / the children have got jobs / I have retired / the children have retired.' If you recognise this pattern in yourself, I recommend you to experiment with a new one: the 'good enough' pattern. So, if you have only ten minutes to read a few paragraphs, that's good enough. And if the children are making a racket and the TV is distracting you and you want to work through an exercise, that's fine – it's good enough. And if there's no one to coach you and you're trying to read the instructions and do the exercise and write notes on the back of an envelope, all at once, it's good enough. You're right, 'good enough' is not perfect – but it's a great deal better than nothing at all, which is what perfectionism often results in.

You may be wondering how long it will take you to go through this book and become a non-smoker. It's up to you. While one person may take two weeks, another may take three months (or a perfectionist may take several years!). Let's say a month or six weeks is a reasonable estimate; however you can take as short or as long a time as you need. Apply the necessary effort, enjoy the journey, and achieve the results you want.

If at some point while working your way through this book you wake up one morning and discover you've become a non-smoker, that's great! However, I don't advise trying to bring that about prematurely; nor do I recommend gradually cutting down your intake. Instead, I recommend continuing to smoke until you are really ready to stop, completely, for good. Research has shown that gradually cutting down rarely works. Nicotine is an addictive substance, and by continuing to take it, even only infrequently, you keep the addiction going. For the same reason, once you have stopped, make sure you stay stopped; it is unrealistic to expect to resume smoking 'socially' without re-starting the addiction. Don't try it – you'd risk having to start stopping all over again.

Just one last point: you may be surprised by the lack of beat-yourself-up smoking facts and statistics in this book. You know the ones: 62.4% of lifelong smokers will turn green by the age of 42; the other 55.3% will lose all the hair in their right eyebrows. I don't like to use scare tactics – there are more effective strategies! In any case, you already know that smoking is bad for you, and you don't need someone like me to patronise you by telling you what you already know. But if you do want medical facts and statistics, the NHS and the anti-smoking organisations QUIT and ASH are useful sources of information and are readily accessible on the internet.

CHAPTER ONE: GETTING STARTED

We're going to start by considering how best to establish what you want to achieve, thinking about it in such a way as to make it easy for you to succeed.

Poor goal-setting can nobble your efforts before you even begin trying to do something. For example, if you haven't identified your target clearly, how will you know when you've hit it? And what about the trap of setting a goal but moving the goalposts? If you've ever fallen into that one, you'll have recognised the folly of repeatedly redefining your measure of success so it's always out of reach.

You may be thinking, 'But it's simple; all I want to do is stop smoking!' But let's look at it a bit more closely. There are certain principles that apply to the art of successful goal-setting and if you apply them to establishing your goal of becoming a non-smoker you'll find it easier to achieve it.

- The more positively and precisely you can define what you want, the better.
- Your goal should be the right size: too big and you'll find it daunting; too small and you won't consider it important enough to put effort into it achieving it.
- You need to consider the wider context and likely consequences of achieving your goal, for yourself and others.

Let's look at how all these points apply to your intention to stop smoking.

EXERCISE: GOAL-SETTING

You'll need paper and pen for this exercise, and plenty of time: you could either set aside an hour to do it in one go, or tackle it in several instalments. Whatever you do, don't rush. Relax, and take it step by step. The more thoroughly you do it, the better. Remember, the purpose of doing this exercise is to enable you to learn more about why you want to become a non-smoker, and refine and strengthen your motivation in such a way as to make it easier for you to attain your goal. It will establish the foundation of your success, so it's worth doing thoroughly.

1 What's important about your goal?

What's important to you about being a non-smoker?

In your notebook, or on a piece of paper, write down at least six things in answer to this question.

2 Headings

Now group your points under headings: typically, they'll include variations along the lines of Health, Wealth, Sociability, Family, Image or Identity, and probably one or two others that are particular to you as an individual.

3 Implications

Then, taking each one in turn, begin unpacking the implications underlying it by asking yourself what's important about that to you. For example, you may have mentioned Family. Take some time to consider what's important to you about

your family in the context of your stopping smoking. It may be that you want to be around for your children or grandchildren, staying alive long enough to be there for them as they grow up. Perhaps it's important to you to be setting them a good example; maybe honesty is an important value for you, and you've been feeling uncomfortable with the hypocrisy of continuing to smoke while telling them they shouldn't do it, or even deceiving them into thinking you don't smoke when actually you've been nipping outside for a cigarette when you thought they weren't looking. Or perhaps your relationship with your partner matters to you, and you've been trying not to notice him or her wincing and moving away from you when your clothes, hair, breath, and skin smell of smoking. To a non-smoker, the smell of cigarette smoke can be revolting; it's hardly surprising if he or she doesn't want to snuggle up if to do so would bring on nausea and a headache!

Notice the values that emerge as you unpack the details and implications of your list of reasons to stop smoking. Values include such things as honesty, courage, love, kindness, autonomy, creativity, health, success, connection, independence, security – things we consider important. What others think of us may influence us greatly, or we may be more self-referenced. Values are strong motivators, driving our actions; but they are often unconscious and we may not be aware of them until we start to question why something matters, why we feel strongly about it.

4 Motivation

Go over your list of reasons to stop smoking and spot the carrots and sticks. This is another way of identifying how we motivate ourselves: do we tend to attach more importance to moving towards a carrot, such as security or safety, or moving away from a stick, such as insecurity or danger. While most people tend to favour one over the other, it makes sense to apply both if you really want to motivate yourself effectively.

Make sure that you have a carrot and a stick for each reason. For example, if Health is one of your reasons, consider the negative health implications of smoking – respiratory problems, circulatory problems, strokes, heart attacks, various cancers etc; then consider the positive health implications of stopping smoking – you'll be able to breathe more easily, feel better, run up stairs, enjoy walking, get fit – really imagine yourself enjoying all the benefits of good health and the differences it will make to your life now and in the future. If Money is a reason for you, add up the financial costs of your smoking, weekly, monthly, annually, over five years, ten years, what it has cost you so far since you started, and what it would cost you if you were to continue into the future; then consider the implications of freeing up that money for other things that are important to you, whether it's saving to provide financial security, or spending to improve the quality of your life or the lives of others.

The more carrots and sticks you can come up with, and the more seriously you take them, the more incentive or leverage you will have to support you in attaining your goal of becoming a non-smoker. Denial is a factor for many smokers: their denial of the negative consequences of continuing to smoke allows them to carry on with it. Like my friend Lin: as part of her job in social services, she was sent on an educational visit to a place where prosthetics are manufactured. Looking at all the artificial bits and pieces – hands, fingers, feet, whatever – Lin asked the director about the main causes for people needing prosthetics. Confident that he would mention injuries, car accidents, that sort of thing, she was shocked when he said that smoking was a major factor, affecting the peripheral circulation so gangrene sets in and bits fall off. In fact she was so shocked she had to have a cigarette to calm down! She recounted this story to me some months after it had happened, and she was still smoking; after all, it's only other people's fingers that fall off, isn't it?

5 Circumstances, context, and consequences

You've already started considering implications and consequences regarding your reasons to stop smoking. Now let's take this a bit further. Your actions don't occur in a vacuum; they occur in a context and they have consequences for you and for others. First look at your list of 'stick' reasons to stop smoking, all the things that you want to move away from, the negative effects of your smoking. Regarding these, what might be some of the destructive consequences of your continuing to smoke? For yourself and for others? In a year? Five years? Ten years? The end of this lifetime? Really allow yourself to imagine these possibilities. Write them down, as bleak as they may be. Secondly, turn to your 'carrot' reasons. Now consider what might be some constructive consequences of your becoming a non-smoker, for yourself

and others ... in a year ... five years ... ten years ... the end of this lifetime? Allow yourself to imagine these possibilities and imagine yourself actually experiencing and enjoying them. Write them down.

One word of warning here: if you want to stop smoking and you have a partner who smokes, I strongly recommend that the two of you discuss the implications of your stopping. Your becoming a non-smoker will have consequences in your relationship. Your partner may be open to stopping too, once he or she has seen how easy you've found it to become a non-smoker; if so, that's great. It even becomes an additional motivation for you to do well. But there are other less helpful possibilities that you need to consider and discuss. Smokers sometimes feel threatened and pressured by a friend or partner becoming a non-smoker. They may react to this perceived threat by trying to sabotage the other person, trying to re-establish the old familiar status quo; they may criticize or ridicule the other person's achievement, perhaps accusing him or her of being no fun any more or being a goody-goody or health-nut or whatever; they may leave cigarettes and lighters lying about, or even offer cigarettes having 'forgotten' that the other person has stopped smoking. Conversely, and potentially more damaging, if one person in an intimate relationship stops smoking while the other continues, the new non-smoker can find himself or herself becoming disgusted by the smell of the partner – and you don't have to try too hard to imagine the problems that can ensue if that happens! So, you have been warned: discuss your intention with your partner and make sure you have both thought about the implications for your relationship and negotiated some mutually satisfactory agreement before you go any further!

While it's helpful to have the support of family, friends and co-workers, it's not essential to do so. In fact another person's discouraging attitude can help to motivate you. How? It throws down a challenge to your inner rebel! If someone disparages your efforts, saying things like, 'You'll never do it. You'll give in when it gets difficult. You never stick to anything. You're too weak,' you need to respond constructively. Let the other person's negative attitude evoke something very positive in you: use it to stoke up your determination to prove the doomsayer wrong! Most smokers have a strong 'rebel' part inside them: when you started smoking, it was with the naughty, rebellious teenagers round the back of the bike sheds, wasn't it (whether literally or metaphorically)? So enlist your inner rebel now, to rebel against any doubters who are running you down. Prove them wrong! Now, if someone tries to discourage you and deflect you from your intention to be a non-smoker, you will become stronger in your resolve, and your goal will become even clearer to you and even easier to achieve.

6 Identity

You may have noticed that I have been using the term 'non-smoker' for all people who don't smoke, including both those who have never smoked and those who have stopped smoking. This is important. It makes a difference whether you consider yourself to be a non-smoker or an ex-smoker. It's about your sense of self-identity. A non-smoker has no desire to smoke: the possibility of smoking doesn't enter his or her mind – it simply isn't an issue. An ex-smoker is a smoker who is not smoking now; this entails various degrees of struggle and evokes a roller-coaster of feelings ranging from pride at winning the battle to fear of losing it, and from pious virtue to sad deprivation and furious frustration; it's about taking one day at a time because the prospect of a life sentence is too daunting to contemplate. It is signing yourself up for ongoing conflict and misery. Don't do it!

If this is an issue for you, you may need to do some work on your sense of identity. Perhaps you've been one of those people who say, 'I'm a smoker. I've always been a smoker, and I always will be.' It's a bit like Popeye's 'I yam what I yam' – and just as silly! Always been a smoker ... really? Were you born puffing away? Some unfortunate children may be born addicted to crack cocaine – but nobody is born a smoker. (Although there may be a case for investigating whether the children of mothers who smoke during pregnancy are predisposed to a susceptibility to nicotine dependency if exposed to it later in life; if so, it would be another reason for women to stop smoking when, or preferably before, they get pregnant.) But even the most ardent smoker started out as a non-smoker. And even the most ardent smoker is many other much more fundamental things: a friend, a mother, a son, a sister, a man, a woman, a human; a thinking, feeling, sentient being. In fact, rather than thinking of smoking in terms of someone as 'being a smoker', it's more useful to think of smoking as an action some people do sometimes. It's about doing, not about being. And it's much easier to change if you think of it in terms of simply changing something you do. Then it can very easily and

quickly become something you used to do in the past: you just don't do it any more. This is an example of cultivating a constructive 'as if' belief, as mentioned earlier. Try it on for size, experiment with it, and if you find it useful, make use of it. If not, just put it on the shelf and leave it there in case you want to return to it later.

7 Want versus ought

The next step in your goal-setting exercise is to consider the relative advantages of 'want' rather than 'ought'. Being motivated by a sense of duty – 'I really ought to wash the car' – is not very inspiring. In fact, in some people, it provokes their inner rebel who promptly wakes up and says, 'Not likely! I don't want to!' But if we want to do something – 'I want to go to the beach' – then we are naturally motivated and it's easy and enjoyable to do it. So take a moment to conjure up an imaginary horizontal line in front of you. At one end of the line is Ought as in 'I ought to stop smoking' and at the other end of the line is Want as in 'I want to stop smoking'. Where along that continuum would you be now? If you'd be well on the way to the Want end you're in good shape; if you'd be more towards the Ought end you'll need to shift yourself. If you find you do need to shift further Want-wards, carry on to complete this exercise, then go over everything you've written and beef it up to bring yourself to the point where you can honestly say: 'I want to stop smoking.'

8 Four questions

You may have surprised yourself already with how much you've discovered about the motivations and values underlying your intention to stop smoking. The following four questions are designed to uncover even more surprises, as they encourage you to draw on deeper levels of your mind for the information. The last one is particularly fiendish – it stops the conscious mind in its tracks, allowing the unconscious mind to come up with something different! Remember to make a note of any new information.

What would happen if you did stop smoking?

What would happen if you didn't stop smoking?

What wouldn't happen if you did stop smoking?

What wouldn't happen if you didn't stop smoking?

9 Imagine achieving the goal

You're nearly there. There's one last thing to do. Relax and let your mind wander. Just imagine that you stop smoking some time in the next few weeks. Imagine yourself floating out into the future, perhaps a year, perhaps a bit further. Imagine turning around and looking back over that intervening time as a non-smoker. How would you feel about yourself and about your achievement? Really allow yourself to imagine rejoicing in your success. We'll make use of this celebration of your achievement later on, in an exercise called Anchoring. It will enable you to draw on this positive state of mind whenever you like, to support you in your new life as a non-smoker.

10 Review

Now take a moment to go over and reflect on what you've learned from this entire exercise. Remember the three principles of successful goal-setting. Your intended outcome should be:

- positively and precisely stated;
- the right size;
- appropriate in terms of wider context and likely consequences for yourself and others.

Review your notes from this exercise and see how well you've addressed these three points. You've probably already spotted an interesting anomaly about the goal of 'stopping smoking'. It's difficult to state it positively! Ideally, when setting a goal, it's better to say what you want, what you are aiming to achieve, rather than what you don't want. For example, if someone says, 'I don't want to be depressed,' you could ask them, 'OK, you don't want to be depressed; so what do you want instead?' And they might say, 'I want to be happy' and that would be their positively stated outcome.

However, we don't have a positive term in English for people who don't smoke: we just call them non-smokers! So you may like to experiment with re-stating or elaborating your intention to stop smoking in terms of what it might mean to you, positively. Take some important value that is totally inconsistent with smoking. For example, one of your high values might be health. Try saying, 'I want to stop smoking in order to be a healthy person.' Or if your spirituality is important to you, you might say, 'I want to stop smoking in order to fully express my spirituality.' Another one might be professional success: 'I want to stop smoking in order to be more successful in my work.' Doing this also addresses the issue of making your goal the right size: it makes it large enough to really matter. People who sort of vaguely wish they could stop smoking, but they're not really sure why, because after all they can afford it and they're still pretty healthy and there's no real reason to stop – those people don't stop, because a vague wish is not a big enough goal to motivate them to achieve it.

Avoid the trap of thinking about not smoking. It's very difficult to think about not doing something. For example, if I were to tell you now to think about yourself not riding a bicycle ... what are you doing? You're almost certainly thinking about yourself riding a bicycle! So instead of trying unsuccessfully to think about not smoking, find something else to think about that is so totally incompatible with it that you just forget about smoking. Imagine yourself doing something that would be impossible for a smoker to do: sitting in your garden on a summer evening, smelling the roses; or cycling effortlessly up the longest hill in the district; or running along the beach, breathing the wonderful sea air. Let your imagination flow, and find out what works for you. Then remind yourself of it frequently: constructive daydreaming can be very useful.

There, you're done. You now have what's called a 'well-formed outcome'. If you know what you want, and you know how to recognise when you've got it, you're already doing better than many people! I recommend that you revisit this exercise from time to time as you go through this book. You may find yourself further refining, clarifying and strengthening your intention and motivation as you continue learning and expanding your horizons.

In completing the above exercise, you've been using NLP techniques. You've been enquiring into how you perceive yourself in your world, how you think, how you communicate with yourself, and how you behave – and how you might make positive changes in all those areas. You've been using your imagination to go beyond the boundaries of the familiar and to jump out of the ruts of habitual ways of thinking. And of course learning to set outcomes well can be very useful on many occasions, not just for stopping smoking.

A word about the importance of constructive self-talk might be appropriate here. Sometimes people get into the habit of criticising themselves in such a way as to stymie future endeavour. How much better would it be to learn how to coach yourself skilfully, so that you learn from your mistakes in order to do better next time? The NLP people have a range of mottoes, among which is this snappy little offering: *There is no failure, only feedback*. It seems a bit facile perhaps – but just think about it for a moment. Mightn't this be an effective 'as if' belief for learning? Imagine a toddler learning to walk. Suppose the first time it tried to walk and fell over it said to itself, 'Well, that's no good. I'm obviously no good at this walking lark. I'm not going to try again. I'm just going to sit here. I know how to do that; I'm comfortable with that.' Luckily small children haven't yet been conditioned to limit themselves: they get up and try again. And again, and again, and again – repeatedly, until they get it. They start to pay attention to what they need to change: perhaps they fell over because they were leaning a bit too far to the left; OK, so lean a bit to the right next time and see what difference that makes. That's how we learned to walk when we were children, and that method can still serve us well as adults. Some of the most useful questions you can ask yourself in any endeavour are along the lines of: 'What's working well?' and, 'What could I experiment with to see if I could get even better results next time?' And just imagine how far such an attitude of enquiry, enjoyment, and experiment could get you.