

THE CHANGE PROCESS by Susanne Murtha

Within each individual some behaviors can be easy to change and others much more difficult. For example adding Abhyanga can be a luscious treat but chewing more slowly requires considerable effort. We each have our unique pattern of mental, emotional and physical patterns (samskaras) that are deeply embedded. So not only do we have different levels of challenge for different behaviors within us, we also may have the same issue as another person but our ability to change that behavior and approach to doing so is entirely different from someone else. As Sally Kempton explains in a *Yoga Journal* article, "For neurophysiologists the strength of the neural pathway is reinforced with repetition. When our samskaras are powerful, knowing better isn't enough to make us change."

A study showed that if heart doctors tell their seriously at-risk heart patients they will literally die if they do not make changes to their personal lives—diet, exercise, smoking—still only one in seven is actually able to make the changes. (*Immunity to Change* 1). 86% of people who try to quit smoking fail. 80% to 98% of those who lose weight regain it back (often more than they lost.) (*Immunity to Change* 42) Robert Kegan attributes this difference between people around the same obstructive behavior to be because the motivation for the behavior to be quite different. These underlying and often unconscious motivations he calls our "immune systems" or "anxiety-management systems"—strategies that have allowed us to get along in life. They are brilliant in one sense but have a cost that often blocks our ability to shift to a higher state of functioning. His system of the different levels of mental complexity among adults has a relationship to the progressive path to enlightenment:

1 **Socialized mind** shaped by definitions and expectations of personal environment

2 **Self-authoring mind** seat of judgement able to step back to make choices with personal authority—not fused with a filter, can look at it

3. **Self-transforming mind**—can step back from and reflect on limits of our own, ideology and be friendlier toward contradictions and opposites.

The self-transforming mind can be the natural result of meditation practice—we welcome everything that arises.

Kegan states that "Overcoming immunity doesn't require elimination of all anxiety-management systems but in building a more complicated system." When we test false beliefs so that we can look at what we were only able to look through, our way of knowing becomes more complex. (49-51)

Robert Kegan writes that "without significant changes in the underlying meanings of behavior, it is very difficult for an individual to sustain behavioral changes."

In *The Greatness of Saturn*, Robert Svoboda tells us something similar "if we can learn how to appropriately channel and harness our own desires, we can use their energy to recreate our own lives." Whether you want to produce an effect in your own personal microcosm or in the macrocosm outside, you need a strong desire for your intended result if you expect it to

manifest. The key to any successful Tantric practice, including upaya (an astrological remedy), is to combine repetition with intensity. For any remedy to work, you must crave your desired outcome as strongly as a drowning person gasps for air and keep craving it thus until it comes to pass" (176).

Dr. Lad beautifully explains how the elements evolved from space to air to fire to water to earth—from subtle to gross. We know from yoga psychology that actions begin with thoughts. Likewise change begins with feeling, thinking and inquiry.

The Transtheoretical Model of Change

James O. Prochaska of the University of Rhode Island and colleagues developed this model in 1977. The Book *Changing for Good* by James O. Prochaska, PhD, John C. Norcross, PhD and Carlo C. Diclemente, PhD was my source for most of the following material.

- Based on the study of people who were successful at changing.
- All changing is self-change since the person who's changing is the one who is doing the work.
- The 6 Stages of Change are Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Maintenance and Termination.
- Matching challenges with the appropriate stage of change helps people to maximize problem-solving efforts.
 - Research has consistently shown that when people attempt changing when they are not ready that only a small % succeed.
 - If they spend too much time working with tasks already mastered, such as understanding the problem, they can delay acting indefinitely.
- Any movement from one stage to the next denotes progress even from denial to acknowledging that there is a problem.
- The average successful self-changer recycles several times through the process but the circles are spiralling upward. In a 2-year study only 5% made it without at least one set-back.
- Research shows that problems are almost always treated more effectively when they are less severe and for a shorter duration. The longer people wait the harder it is to change. (The "they have to hit bottom theory" is not valid.)

Precontemplation—I can't, I won't

- No intension of changing in the next 6 months
- Can't see the problem—denial
- It's everyone else's fault
- Don't want to think, talk or read about their problem because they feel the situation is hopeless
- Cons of changing always outweigh the pros
- Precontemplators are usually powerless to change without assistance from others or an environmental of change-of-life circumstance.
- Precontemplation feels safe—can't fail there

Strategy for Precontemplation

What we can do is:

- Don't resist resistance. Reflect back with empathy
- Don't push for action, work with inquiry around behavior

and gentle encouragement to contemplate change. The client is responsible for choosing and finding solutions about change.

- Our own belief in the client's ability to change can be a powerful motivator. For the client to move forward, the pros must outweigh the cons and realistic strategies are necessary to overcome cons.

What we can ask the client to do is:

- Observe current behavior to identify any hidden agenda on why it's useful to stay the same.
- Determine what's meaningful about changing.
- Identify the difference or gap between what is happening now and the desire to be different.
- Identify any discomfort around the problem and our role is to let the person feel the discomfort. Holding the space for discomfort without judgement.

Questions to Determine if in Precontemplation

- How long have you been doing _____? Is this something that's just part of your routine? Do you ever feel defensive about it? (Defensive = precontemplation stage)
- Has this ever felt like it contributes to your not feeling as well as you could? If so: Is it something you'd consider changing in the next 6 months?
- How much do you know about _____? Are you aware of the short and long-term effects of _____? Would you be interested in learning more about _____? (Precontemplators avoid learning about their problems. If/when they are open to education they are on the way to contemplation stage.)

Questions to Plant the Seeds of Change in Precontemplators

- What concerns do you have about your current behavior?
- How might your current behavior lead to problems in the future?
- Would noticing how it feels when you _____ be something you'd be interested in trying? Would you be willing to check in with me via e-mail in (1 week) about what you discovered? (Accountability is a support and motivator for change)

Contemplation—I may

- Intending to take action in the next 6 months
- Pros increase
- Almost all people in the contemplation stage are eager to talk about themselves and their problems, searching for reassurance that their concerns can be understood and overcome.
- Contemplators are open to reading articles and books in general but are not ready for action until they achieve better understanding about their behavior.
- Consciousness-raising is important in Contemplation stage as well as in Precontemplation.
- Desire to change exists simultaneously with an unwitting resistance to it. Action can bring with it a terrifying, even paralyzing fear of failure.
- Change threatens our identity.
- Chronic contemplators substitute thinking for acting, prom-

ising that they are someday going to act.

- The transition from Precontemplation to Preparation is apparent when thinking shifts from the problem to a focus on the solution and from the past to the future.

Negative Responses to Contemplation

- Search of absolute certainty.
- Waiting for when the "time is right"
- Wishful thinking.
- Premature action demanded by others often results in failure.
- Techniques without awareness behind them don't have a chance to make any real impact on our inner selves, and so have little lasting effect. Awareness may require no more than a few weeks of honest self-appraisal.
- A critical barrier to changing many problem behaviors is that serious consequences seem too distant or long-term to matter.

Strategy for Contemplation

- Consciousness-raising remains important throughout the contemplation stage. Objectives are to develop greater awareness of problem behavior, gain insight into how thinking and feeling maintain the problem, begin to develop a personal conviction of the value of change. When the person has more information, more awareness, more self-motivation—it's time for the preparation stage of change.
- Self-reevaluation follows naturally from consciousness-raising.

What we can do is:

- Show empathy. Contemplators seek understanding and welcome knowledge that others have been where they are. (Stories about ourself or another person in a similar situation.)
- Genuine attitude of acceptance and caring without underlying expectations and judgements.
- Don't push for action prematurely.

What we can ask the client to do is:

- Test out new behaviors—notice the negative consequences for the undesirable behaviors and the positive consequences for desired behavior.
- Get a different perspective to uncover any blindspot, competing agendas or competing values.

Asking for specific help from friends and family:

- It's helpful for contemplators to inform helpers of their specific needs (I seek understanding and support but not advise at this time." "I just need someone to listen." "I may benefit from your change techniques in a few weeks.")
- In contemplation ask helpers to assist in gathering more information, awareness and self-motivation. Loved ones can calmly report their observations and knowledge about the problem. Family members may have an accurate idea of what precedes and follows the behavior. Take a risk with your loved ones to solicit their input. The resulting awareness can help the transition into Preparation.

Questions for the Contemplation Stage

- What do you imagine your life will be like 5 years from now if you continue to _____?
- What kind of impact will this have on your family and relationships?
- How does your body react or adjust to _____?
- What affect does _____ have on you?
- Are your essential values in conflict with your behavior? Can you feel good about yourself while continuing your behavior? What will you lose by abandoning your problem behavior? What time, energy, pleasures or fantasies must you give up in order to change? Exactly what behaviors would you like to change? Define the goals that are important to YOU regardless of what others might think or say.
- Is there a way that you can measure and track your progress? (This allows baseline to compare against—amounts, frequency, intensity, time. Generally multiple measures are better than single measures. Seeing where you came from can be a more effective motivator than measuring yourself against the ideal.)
- Monitor external events preceding behavior and internal reactions. What happened before, during and after the behavior? What feelings emerge associated with the behavior? What self-talk leads to the behavior?
- What are the payoffs for indulgence? What pleasure or gratification arises? Do other feelings follow?

Preparation—I will

- Intending to act in the next 30 days and making the final adjustments before changing their behavior.
- Ambivalence may not be resolved.
- Continue to reevaluate self and problem but feel increasingly confident of decision to change.
- Looking toward the future more than to the past is most supportive during this stage.
- Create new, functional images of your future self.
- Focus is on finding the most suitable type of action to overcome imbalance.
- May still need to convince themselves that taking action is what's best.
- Believing that you CAN accomplish what you want to is one of the most important ingredients for success. Self-efficacy helps with perseverance when obstacles arise and it plays an important role when adjusting to psychological and physical imbalances whether they are self-guided or professionally guided. (Positive Psychology Handbook)
- Preparation Stage can be tedious but is necessary. Premature action can lead to ineffectual change.

Strategy for Preparation

- Develop a firm, detailed action plan
- Determine SMART Goals—specific, measurable, accountable, realistic, time-bound
- Understand the change process all the way through the maintenance stage.
- Ask for help from others to act or not act in specific ways to support desired change. (Support is most important in the stages before and after action.)
- A great motivator is a vision of life with the healthy habits in place and a list of the benefits of change in a place that

can be read frequently.

- Changing needs to be a priority
- Making a clear commitment begins in the Preparation stage and continues through the Action and Maintenance Stages.
- Anxiety is common. 5 steps to counter anxiety:
 1. Set a date to begin, guard against reasons to delay it. Change when external environment most supportive (holidays and summertime are more difficult)
 2. Take small, realistic steps
 3. Tell others about the commitment to change
 4. Prepare for change as a major life event. Giving birth. For the person who is changing and those who support her it comes first and everything else second. Expect the disruption to last for several weeks or more.
 5. Create a personalized and specific plan of action. Developing a unique plan builds energy and commitment. Helpful steps:
 - Review and learn from any previous attempts to change
 - List a variety of techniques for coping with any expected obstacles.
 - Pay attention to external environment and internal states

Questions for the Preparation Stage

- How will your life be enhanced?
- What changes would you like to make in your routine?
- What will your life look like?
- How do you envision the effect of your change on your health? Your relationships? Your work?
- How will your full potential be revealed when you change?
- What strategies can you put in place to create a successful environment for change?
- How can you enlist others support and be specific with them about what you need?

Action—I am

Charaka's Schedule for Giving Up Addictions:

"A wise person should give up by and by unwholesome practices to which he is addicted and he should correspondingly adopt ones which are wholesome.

On the first day one should give up a quarter of the unwholesome practice and correspondingly adopt a quarter of wholesome. On the second day half of the unwholesome practice is to be given up and half of the wholesome one is to be adopted; this is to be continued for the third day also. On the fourth day, three quarters of the unwholesome practice is to be given up and three quarters of the wholesome one is to be adopted. This process is to be continued on the 5th and 6th day also. The process of giving up of the unwholesome practice and adoption of the wholesome practice is completed fully on the 7th day."

Notes: There is, however, difference of opinion of the process and duration so it may take longer time.

Note: One should not be in a hurry to give up and to adopt the unwholesome and wholesome practices respectively. A sudden

change in habits is likely to cause immense harm to the body. Astanga Hrdaya: Sutra 3:58, Only a slow and steady process as indicated in the text above can absolutely eradicate the effects of unwholesome practices and stabilize the effects of wholesome ones. (Sutrasthana, Chapter VII #35)

"The 7 days at the end of commencement of rtus (seasons) is known as Rtusandhi (inter seasonal period). During that period, the regimen of the preceding season should be discontinued gradually and that of the succeeding season should be adopted (gradually); sudden discontinuance or sudden adoption gives rise to diseases caused by asatmya (non-habituation)" (Astanga Hrdaya: Sutra 3:58).

Action Stage of Change

- Made overt changes for less than 6 months
- Requires the greatest commitment of time and energy. Commitment requires faith in ability to succeed and specific actions.
- The very act of committing increases the likelihood of success. It includes not only a willingness to act but also a belief in ability to change.
- Quitting a habit can require not only sacrifice and energy but the pain of other's disapproval or anxiety that the self-changer is different.
- There are no simple solutions to complex behavior problems.
- No single method is so effective that its use guarantees success. Combining a variety of techniques at the proper time is more likely to bring the desired results.
- Action followed by relapse is better than no action as the spiral is upward

Strategies for Action

- Stick to SMART Goals (specific, measurable, accountable, realistic, time-bound)
- Use successes to motivate
- Realize that set backs are part of the process, draw from success in other areas of life and remember past successes
- See percentage of improvement over failure (i.e. with a goal of dinacharya 5x per week but successful 3x = 60% success—better than half.)

Change Processes that are Helpful at the Action Stage:

Countering—substituting healthy behavior for unhealthy behaviors is one of the most powerful processes available to changers.

1. Active Diversion —keeping busy—finding an activity that precluded the problem behavior
2. Appropriate exercise or yoga to
 - Improve body image, self-image and self-esteem
 - Increase energy, metabolism
 - Increase endorphins
 - Decrease anxiety and depression
 - Decrease physical and emotional pain
3. Stress-reduction, conscious breathing, and meditation
 - Increases energy
 - Increases alpha (pleasurable) brain waves
 - Decreases blood pressure and muscle tension

- Decreases anxiety
- Improves sleep
- Improves health
- Improves concentration
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4. Counter thinking—consciously noticing and refuting self-talk that is often automatic, subconscious and compelling. Invite a realistic perspective. Ask "What am I telling myself that is getting me so upset?" Some irrational self-statements are:

- I must have everyone like me.
- I should be thoroughly competent at everything I do.
- I can only feel good about myself when I am doing well.
- I can't control my anxiety/anger/fear/despair etc.
- I can't resist my urges and cravings.
- I can't stand it when I'm not treated fairly.
- I need to _____ in order to cope with life's stresses.

Clues to when someone is thinking from a narrow or absolute perspective is their use of "I have to", "I need", "I must" Question this self-talk.

5. Assertiveness—being assertive can communicate thoughts, feelings, wishes and intentions and counter feelings of helplessness. Everyone has the right to be heard, to make mistakes, to change their mind, to resist other people's judgements, not to have to justify their actions, to set limit and boundaries and have them respected. Questions "Did I express my rights?" "Did I respect his or her rights?" "Was I specific about a behavior change?" Affirmative responses to these questions means that you were being assertive rather than aggressive.

Environmental Control—restructuring the environment to reduce the stimulus and temptations to act in the old pattern.

1. Avoidance—eliminate temptation "Avoiding avoidance is foolhardy and dangerous"—James Proschaska, PhD; especially in the beginning of action
2. Cues—gradually allowing exposure to the things that trigger unhealthy behavior to increase resistance. First confront problem cues in imagination.
3. Reminders—put signs and add desired action to calendar and "to-do" list. Checking something off creates the pleasure of accomplishment.

Reward

1. Self Praise—silent self praise to counter any anxiety for not indulging in undesired behavior. Punishment is ineffective at eliminating the problem, decrease self-esteem and is a barrier to the change process. Action is a process of not only changing specific behaviors but in changing self-image and self-esteem.
2. Contracting—Make a contract with yourself. Written contracts are more powerful than spoken ones. Reinforce not engaging in problem behavior and reward substituting healthy alternatives.
3. Step-by-step—gradually shape the behavior in the new, desirable direction to build a solid foundation for change.

Enlist the help of Friends and Family—Clearly ask for help.

1. Ask a buddy to join in a healthy behavior. Work as a team to make a lifestyle change.
2. Ask family to ban or remove triggers from the home.
3. Make a self-change contract with concerned parties
 - Keep it positive, avoid scolding, nagging, preaching and embarrassment. Reinforcement is superior to punishment. Give at least 3 compliments to every criticism
4. Let supporters know of ways to provide steady reinforcement:
 - Verbal praise, extra hugs, notes, small presents
 - Brag to others about your progress
5. Seek support for life with a local support group.

Questions at the Action Stage

- Tell me about the successes with your goals. What did you have to do to make that happen?
- How did it feel for you when _____?
(Keep clients in the positive)
- What strengths did you use to _____?

Maintenance—I still am

- Made changes for more than 6 months
- New Years Resolutions: 77% successful for 1 week, 55% after 1 month, 40% after 6 months and 19% after 2 years.
- Maintenance is often far more difficult to achieve than Action.
- Long, ongoing process
- Must work to consolidate gains attained through preceding stages to prevent relapses
- Former problems, especially addictive ones, hold some attraction long after the habit is broken.
- The most common threats to maintenance are social pressures, internal challenges and special situations.
- External temptations and intense situations can trigger defective thinking and old patterns. Such situations although dangerous, are signs of success because they can only be experienced after significant and sustained changes have been made.
- Overconfidence, daily temptation and self-blame are internal challenges related to relapse.

Strategy for Maintenance

Two factors are fundamental to successful maintenance:

1. Sustained, long-term effort
 2. Revised life-style
- Review list of the negative aspects of the unhealthy behavior and difficulties in early change efforts periodically and first signs of slipping
 - Review reasons for change.
 - Take credit for your accomplishments and responsibility for change. Reflect on the success that have been made and celebrate at designated anniversary dates to renew the commitment.
 - Continue to use environmental controls. It never signifies weakness but rather intelligence, health and foresight.
 - Create a new lifestyle—continue techniques that worked in the Action Stage.

- Periodically check-in about consistent and honest thinking and self-talk—denial, distortion and rationalization are the enemies of maintenance.
- Ask for support if motivation is dwindling. Ask to be reminded of the consequences of the prior behavior.

Questions at the Maintenance Stage:

- Tell me about the successes with your goals this week.
- How did it feel to _____?
- What worked to make the goal successful?
- How motivated/passionate do you feel about your goals now?

Questions when Relapse Happens:

- How do you feel? What picture would you rather have?
- What worked for you in the past?
- Tell me about the days when _____.

Termination—I am free

- Absence of any regard for the undesired behavior
- Some changes need to be worked with for a life-time and some can be terminated.
- There's debate whether certain problems can become secure life-habits that are no longer a risk.

Susanne Murtha is certified ASCM Wellness Coach, Kripalu Yoga Instructor, Integrative Yoga Therapist and Kripalu School of Ayurveda graduate. She lives in the Adirondack Mountains of Northern NY. Contact Susanne at Susanne@livingwellcoaching.com and Susanne@yogaintheadirondacks.com, 518.251.3015.

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