

The Use of a Retreat Format to Assist in Recovery from Addictions

by Durga Devi O'Neill

According to Dr David Frawley, addictions are a form of mental disorder that occur from too much *tamas* (inertia) in the mind. This is often caused by excess *rajas* (mental disturbance), which is compensated for by providing an artificial calm.¹ Many people who recover from addictions report a 'moment of clarity' as the turning point in their life from the path of destruction to the path of recovery. This can be seen as *sattva* (truth/intelligence/clarity) shining through the *rajas* and *tamas*, a moment in which we are receptive to divine grace, a moment powerful enough to change the course of life, leading the addict to seek help. While this revelation of *sattva* is a life-saving flash of inspiration that shifts the mind in a new direction, it rarely rebalances the entire system or deeply purifies the intellect, hence *prajñāparādha* (mistake of the intellect) is still a major factor in those who embark on a program of recovery. A comprehensive approach to recovery is the integration of yoga practice, psychology and philosophy with twelve-step methodology alongside the physiological and broader understanding of cultivating *sattva* as found in Ayurveda. This approach helps with initial recovery as well as maintaining health and wellness in the long-term.

Modern medical approaches to treating addiction center predominantly on the mind. This includes psychotherapy and pharmaceuticals such as anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications. Many doctors and therapists also recommend that their patients attend the spiritually based twelve-step programs. People in the twelve-step fellowship have a commitment to continued growth and progress, to which end they usually attend one-hour meetings a few times per week. The original twelve-step program, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), recommends an "occasional retreat from the outside world where we can quiet down for an undisturbed day or so of self-overhaul and meditation".² A retreat offers people a greater opportunity to immerse and reconnect with themselves; it provides both education and experiential learning on how to cultivate *sattva* on an ongoing basis to build on and strengthen their recovery.



Sensory Relaxation

Classically, rehabilitation therapy that deals with alcohol or drug addicts can be a life or death mission. However, the second 'anonymous' group to be formed was Al-Anon –for the relatives and friends of alcoholics. This shows the 'contagious' nature of the disease of addiction; its devastation affects everyone close to the addict to the extent that these people are diagnosed as co-addicts (codependents) - those who take on the symptoms of the addiction without actually being dependent on any substance. Traditional rehabilitation is not an option for these people as their situation is not an emergency, yet they suffer as much from their disease as the 'primary' addict. Also, now that addiction involves ever-increasing substances and behaviors, not all who are affected require formal rehabilitation. Co-addicts and people with eating disorders and other compulsive behavioral patterns such as overspending, gambling and overworking benefit immensely from a retreat that offers them a completely new way to identify and interpret their responses and reactions to life.

* In Ayurvedic terms all addictions result in increased *vata* including metabolic disorders, i.e. hypoglycemia leading to sugar cravings, chronic constipation, insomnia, fatigue, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, depression, anxiety, ulcers, headaches, heart pains/palpitations, liver malfunction, and decreased immune function