

Book Review / Compte rendu

Alderson, K. (2011). *Breathe, Freedom: A Comprehensive and Hypnotic Approach to Quitting Smoking. Respirez, Liberté : Une approche globale et hypnotique pour surmonter le tabagisme*. London, ON: Insomniac Press. ISBN: 978-1554830213, 253 pages.

Reviewed by: Aaron L. Block

ABSTRACT

This book review focuses on the story of Freedom who, in his quest for belonging, becomes addicted to cigarettes. Through living hard and being forced to learn life's lessons, Freedom becomes enlightened and overcomes his addiction through medical and psychosocial interventions. The narrative serves as a backdrop to presenting a multicomponent treatment program. The program includes smoking cessation aids, drug therapy approaches, and hypnosis to help the reader achieve abstinence after one year at a purported success rate of 50%. The author reassures us that this is evidence of efficacy, given that smoking is an addiction and not just a habit.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce livre porte sur l'histoire de Liberté, qui dans sa quête d'appartenance devient dépendant de la cigarette. Obligé d'apprendre les leçons d'une vie difficile, Liberté devient éclairé et surmonte le tabagisme à l'aide d'interventions médicales et psychosociales. L'auteur se sert du récit pour cadrer un programme de traitement compréhensif qui comprend des aides de cessation du tabagisme, des approches de thérapie, et l'hypnose pour aider le lecteur à réaliser l'abstinence après un an à un taux prétendu de réussite de 50 %. L'auteur nous rassure que ce taux met en évidence l'efficacité du programme étant donné que le tabagisme est non seulement une habitude mais une dépendance.

Dr. Kevin Alderson, a registered psychologist and associate professor in the counseling department at the University of Calgary, writes this book against the backdrop of 29 years of practicing hypnotherapy, a history of being exposed to fables and fairy tales while falling asleep as a child, and having lost a father and dear friend to the well-researched and deadly effects of smoking. The book is written in two parts. The first section is written as the narrative of a boy named Freedom who matures into manhood and acquires the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours to maintain a smoking-free lifestyle. Freedom experiences a state of metanoia as he shifts from a state of precontemplation with no intention of quitting smoking to having little temptation to smoke in the maintenance phase of the Transtheoretical Model of Change. Only once readers have had this vicarious experience alongside Freedom are they ready to follow and comply with the evidence-based strategies in the second part of the book.

The second section presents a multicomponent smoking cessation program in which hypnosis is eloquently presented as an adjunct to evidence-based treat-

ment approaches, including cognitive-behavioural therapy and medical strategies. Recognizing smoking as an addiction, the author claims that 50% of those who follow his cessation program have successfully abstained from smoking for at least one year.

Within the introduction, the author effectively, efficiently, and concretely explains the short- and long-term effects of smoking and resultant deaths to cancer, lung disease, and cardiovascular disease, as well as the short- and long-term outcomes associated with cessation. Moreover, the author recommends readers literally and figuratively “rip this book apart,” asserting that they will be given direct, indirect, and subliminal messages and suggestions that will bring about *metanoia* or a deep soulful change to their self-worth, confidence, and life in general.

Subsequent chapters are numbered according to the various lessons Freedom is required to learn in order to “kick the crap” out of his addiction. The narrative covers Chapters 1 through 6. We are introduced to Freedom as a young boy beginning kindergarten and follow him as he matures into his early 40s. Freedom has a sister, Star, and parents who experience the lifestyle and side effects of marijuana abuse. Realizing that his father’s lack of employment and personal instability is the result of marijuana use, Freedom experiences loneliness and isolation, suffers sibling rivalry, and has difficulties developing age-appropriate friendships. Driven to find a solution to being bullied, he turns to martial arts, yet he longs to be a member of the gang responsible for his angst. Freedom uses his Aikido training to push back against the bullies. Victorious, he is abruptly confronted with the reality of gang membership and one of the costs of affiliation: smoking. This new requirement to belongingness conflicts with the principles and teachings of Aikido by his respected sensei. After several years of drinking, fighting, and general delinquency, Freedom comes to terms with his life and decisively reconnects with his mother, sister, and Aikido. This is a story with strong male themes.

Chapters 7 through 13 provide a rich and vivid narrative about how Freedom overcomes his smoking addiction with the help of a psychologist, physician, family, and friends. The Breathe Freedom Stop Smoking Program is showcased. It consists of 10 steps, separated into 8 parts from A to H. Part A explains the process of abdominal breathing, Part B teases out the reasons for quitting smoking, and Part C explores the antecedents to smoking. Strategies for dealing with smoking urges are found in Part D, which forms the heart of the program named *BAMM!* Preparatory actions are listed in Part E, and Part F illustrates the self-hypnotic procedure, which is accompanied by a 30-minute online audio session specific to reinforcing the strategies detailed in the book. Part G puts into action the key elements of “Quit Day,” and Part H is a support agreement, also found online, to obtain public support for those intent on quitting.

Throughout the book, the author keeps the reader engaged with humorous self-reflections and frank realizations about life. In some cases, Alderson uses language that may seem offensive to some but makes his point in the fewest number of words. What makes this book so appealing is that the author’s voice is clearly present throughout; he writes in a concise and effective manner using wisely the words that appear to

come easily to him, while the reader is left with simple and easy-to-follow steps to accomplish the goal of smoking cessation.

The Breathe Freedom Stop Smoking Program is a quick reference that spans only 37 pages in a bare bones explanation of cognitive-behavioural strategies and tools to support smoking cessation once the reader has completed the first part of the book. I wondered where the content was that would flesh out the details of the strategies presented, but upon reflection realized that my answers lie in the vivid recollection of Freedom's experiences. Again, Alderson achieves his purpose of relating the key components of an effective treatment plan in few words, which also lends itself to quick and easy reference for therapist and client alike.

This book can be prescribed to clients following the first session of therapy for a quick read. The book is male oriented, but women can gain valuable insight into the male psyche. The theme of emotional maturation, as well as overcoming challenges and becoming at peace with oneself, is at the heart. There are times when the examples are quite explicit with respect to language and content, but they nonetheless resonate with the reader in a profound and often spiritual manner. I enjoyed the book's short, blunt, and concrete sentences; the use of titles predictive of content that supported the chapter's message; and the direct, indirect, and often subliminal themes about life without overstating or belabouring points. One drawback is that the story of Freedom might not resonate as well with a female audience, who may be tempted to skip to Part 2 despite warnings by the author not to do so. The motivation to persist and stick with treatment seems to hinge on having lived vicariously through Freedom on some level, which may not be so easily done for some readers. This is not a technical book designed to teach therapists cognitive-behavioural strategies to address addictions, but both novice and seasoned therapists will realize the benefits to their clients in supporting their efforts to stop smoking.

About the Author

Aaron Block is in private practice as a registered psychologist with Block Psychological Solutions, St. Albert, Alberta. His main interests are addictions, mood, and anxiety disorders.

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