

## ***Letting Go***

By Ryan Harrison

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What do you do in those all-too-common moments of life when you're at the end of your rope and someone seems to unravel it before your eyes? Do you give in and say those words you know you'll regret later? Do you see red and lash out in some other equally destructive way? If you're like most people, you lose control precisely in the moments when you really need it the most.

Perhaps a different kind of "losing control" would serve you – and the object of your frustration – a little better.

In contemplative practices there is the concept of "Letting Go," a powerful technique through which you can release the need to respond to whatever it is that is stirring up your emotions. You can visualize and practice this by holding a small, unbreakable item (like a coin or eraser) in your open hand. Imagine that this item is a physical manifestation of what is bothering you; this problem is literally in the palm of your hand. Now, close your fist around the object as tight as you can. Notice the energy that it takes to hold it in such a manner. You may even be squeezing it so hard that it hurts and you can feel your muscles fatiguing. Keep squeezing, but turn your hand over so your knuckles are up and your palm facing down. Now – here's the secret – take a deep breath and just open your hand, letting whatever it is you were clutching simply fall to the floor. This, in essence, is Letting Go.

You don't have to have a physical object to practice Letting Go, but it can be very useful in the beginning to help you develop this response to life's stressors. You may even consider carrying a small stone or other item in your pocket that you can use throughout the day as necessary while you hone this skill.

Regardless of whether or not you use a prop, the idea is that rather than trying to get a better grip on the situation and trying to control it so fiercely that it's fatiguing, you let it go instead. It certainly seems counter-intuitive, but that only reflects our fear-based desire to exert control over situations that seem to be threatening. Letting Go offers an opportunity to relax into an uncomfortable situation instead of pushing against it. This approach helps calm the mind and nerves, slows down your breathing and racing heartbeat, and makes space for thinking that is less emotionally charged and more likely to be productive.

When you Let Go of tension and energy that have you emotionally bound up, the problem at hand will probably not just disappear. That's okay – Letting Go isn't about escaping problems. Rather, it is about giving you an opportunity to release yourself from your own spiraling negative emotions. This, in turn, allows you to face the situation with a clearer head and heart.

Letting Go can be very useful for helping you to come back to your center in everyday situations. As with most things, practicing it often will result in greater flexibility and facility. When used frequently, this tool can literally transform your life.