

Recovery Notes

September 25, 2015

Preface

The last time I drank alcohol was September 24, 1990, and I believe September 25, 2015 is a good time to remember and review my recovery experiences.

My family's love encouraged me to try AA one more time, and my AA family helped me gain a recovery foothold with their caring and sharing. They cared for me until I was also able to care for myself. Their sharing helped me find new ways to live, and to die if I so chose.

This monograph is an expression of my gratitude to all those who helped me on recovery's journey. This monograph is partial collection of notes acquired over the past 25 years. It includes some of my thoughts and the many useful thoughts of others. I identified the material of others when it was known. In general the material is serious and can be thought provoking with an occasional dash of humor. I offer these, my Recovery Notes, with the hope you will take what is useful to you and leave the rest. Please note, this monograph has two main sections, Recovery Notes and notes about my working the Suggested Program of Recovery (the 12 Step program). This is not a complete collection of notes, but only a small sample.

There are words that we use everyday that have special meaning to me in the context of recovery. They are **God**, **Love** and **Work**.

The word God is often used in recovery. This word has special meaning to many who have a deep spiritual faith and can be useful for them in recovery. However, there are others who find that word a distraction, if not a block to recovery. Some have been abused by the use of that word, God. The abuse comes from others and can take the form: *"I know God and you don't, so you better listen to me. God told me what you should do, so you better listen to me."*

After working with different men, I needed to find a definition of the word God that could work for both groups. The definition I use in recovery is, ***God is anything inside or outside of me that helps me live the life I wish to live and was meant to live.*** This relies upon a very personal interpretation of what God means to the individual. At times God may be a Group Of Drunks, or Good Orderly Direction, or Honesty, or a book, or some inspirational experience. This God can come in many different flavors. I came to believe, any individual can find God using this definition, if they look for God. On the other hand, they will not find God, if they don't look.

The word love, in recovery, means I care about the growth and well being of someone who suffers from alcoholism and/or addiction. I am willing to help someone to find recovery without any kind of payback. I wish to pass on what was freely given to me. It is like the love a healthy parent gives to a child to help them grow into a full human being.

The word work was and is a very important word for me. ***Work is something I do not want to do, but I need to do in order to live the life I wish to live.*** I did not want to work the Steps, but I needed to work the Steps to change my old way of dying into a new way of living.

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Welcome Newcomer.

We are glad you are here, and we would like you to know We Care.

You may be new to recovery as an alcoholic, addict or someone who is in a relationship with an alcoholic or addict. Or you may be someone who has a problem and would like more information about recovery. Whoever you are, you are welcome to the ***Open Meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous***. If you are an alcoholic, then you can find others at these meetings who will share their recovery experience. If you are an addict, there are those at these meetings who will help you and guide you to local ***Narcotics Anonymous*** (or other recovery groups) to get started. If you are in a relationship with someone who has a problem, you may be directed to ***Al-Anon***. If you would like more information, please do not be afraid to ask questions. The only bad question, is the one not asked.

Being a newcomer can be overwhelming. Many of us felt scared and confused. We were isolated and alone. We were Dr. Jekyll on the outside, pretending to be someone we were not, and Mr. Hyde on the inside, hiding someone we did not want to be. It was easy to feel broken and fragmented. Trying to change oneself was extremely difficult if not impossible. It was much easier to go back to what we knew then it was to change. This was true even if we knew it would lead us downhill into a self-made hell. That's the way it was until we became a newcomer.

For some the early days of recovery are a great relief. The main problem is recognized and accepted. No more denial. The result is a happy and euphoric feeling known as a "pink cloud." For others there is the pain and agony of facing their problems, not knowing where to go or what to do. In either case, our experience has been "this too, shall pass." We suggest keeping things simple for awhile in the beginning. For One Day At A Time, that is just today, don't drink or drug and go a meeting.

The experience of others can be very helpful in finding a new way to live. That is one of the main reasons we have meetings. We willingly offer our experience, strength and hope. Remember we were newcomers also. We found a way to recover, and will share that experience. It is easier if you use the information about what worked and what did not work for us, rather than repeating the pain of learning we went through. We gained strength and support by joining the group. We moved from a ME World to a WE World. We were no longer alone. Hope comes from seeing those who found recovery and are enjoying what they found. They are truly comfortable in their own skin. They help the newcomer believe in recovery.

We all benefit from the knowledge of others. It makes sense to use 12 step meetings as a pillar of support in recovery. The level of support from this Fellowship is high, because 12 step meetings are so widespread and established. Recovery is about finding a new way to live. We are always in the act of creating our life for ourselves, whether we are aware of it or not.

Our choices today determine who we are tomorrow.

Acceptance

From Alcoholics Anonymous page 449 in the 3rd edition or page 417 in the 4th edition.

"And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation-some fact of my life unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God's world by mistake. Until I could accept my alcoholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life's terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitudes."

Attitude by Charles Swindoll

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company ... a church ... a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude ... ***I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me, and 90% how I react to it.*** And so it is with you ... we are in charge of our Attitudes."

Tolerance

The most lovable quality any human being can possess is tolerance... It is the vision that enables one to see things from another's viewpoint. It is the generosity that concedes to others the right to their own opinions and their own peculiarities. It is the bigness that enables us to let people be happy in their own way instead of our way. - Anonymous
(Reprinted from the Good Will Magazine, San Francisco)

AA Summarized in Three Word Sentences

"Keep it simple."

"Do not drink."

"Go to meetings."

"Read the book."

"Get a Sponsor."

"Work the steps."

"Call your sponsor."

About God and AA ...

God's presence in the world makes itself felt in so many ways, particularly when people care for one another. The way in which the AA movement operates is a continuous manifestation of God's love weaving its way through the lives of people deeply beset by the most horrendous problems. This program always made me think that this is the way the Church should function. Members of the Twelve Step program develop an attachment to God that is touching in its humility and wonderfully childlike in its simplicity. It is big and grand enough to embrace people of all religions and races and every variety of pain and sin. It has the all-embracing goodness of God. Unlike churches, which feel, they must segregate people according to rigid doctrinal beliefs, and which crusade publicly for high moral righteousness in such a pompous way that sinners are frightened off, this program welcomes sinners and embraces them warmly. The sensitivity of people in the Twelve Step program is what genuinely religious people should be like in their caring for one another. No hour is too late, no time too long to help one who is on the verge of giving up or on the brink of despair. Their caring for one another is a touching manifestation of what Jesus meant when He said, "Love one another as I have loved you."

Every individual in this program could tell you of the miracles of God's grace and the intimate way God has worked not only in their own lives, but also in the lives of those they have sponsored or helped. And though they would not call themselves such, they are truly religious. It is clear when you become familiar with members of these programs how much they all depend on each other, and how deeply they have affected each others lives. It makes God's presence in humanity so real and so tangible you feel as if you can almost touch Him. "Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst." Where people touch one another so deeply and so palpably, you know that God is there. Where there is charity and love, there is God.

from NEVER ALONE, A Personal Way to God by JOSEPH F. GIRZONE page 85,86

ALSO BY JOSEPH F. GIRZONE

Joshua

Joshua and the Children

Joshua in the Holy Land

Attitude Adjustment

A little story with a point. I was driving along an old country road when I came to a four way stop. I stopped and looked both ways. I began to cautiously drive my car when another car came racing out of nowhere. Beeping their horn and just missed me. They were young kids out for a “joy” ride. As they passed me, one of the kids in the back seat give me the finger!

At this point I could respond in any number of ways.

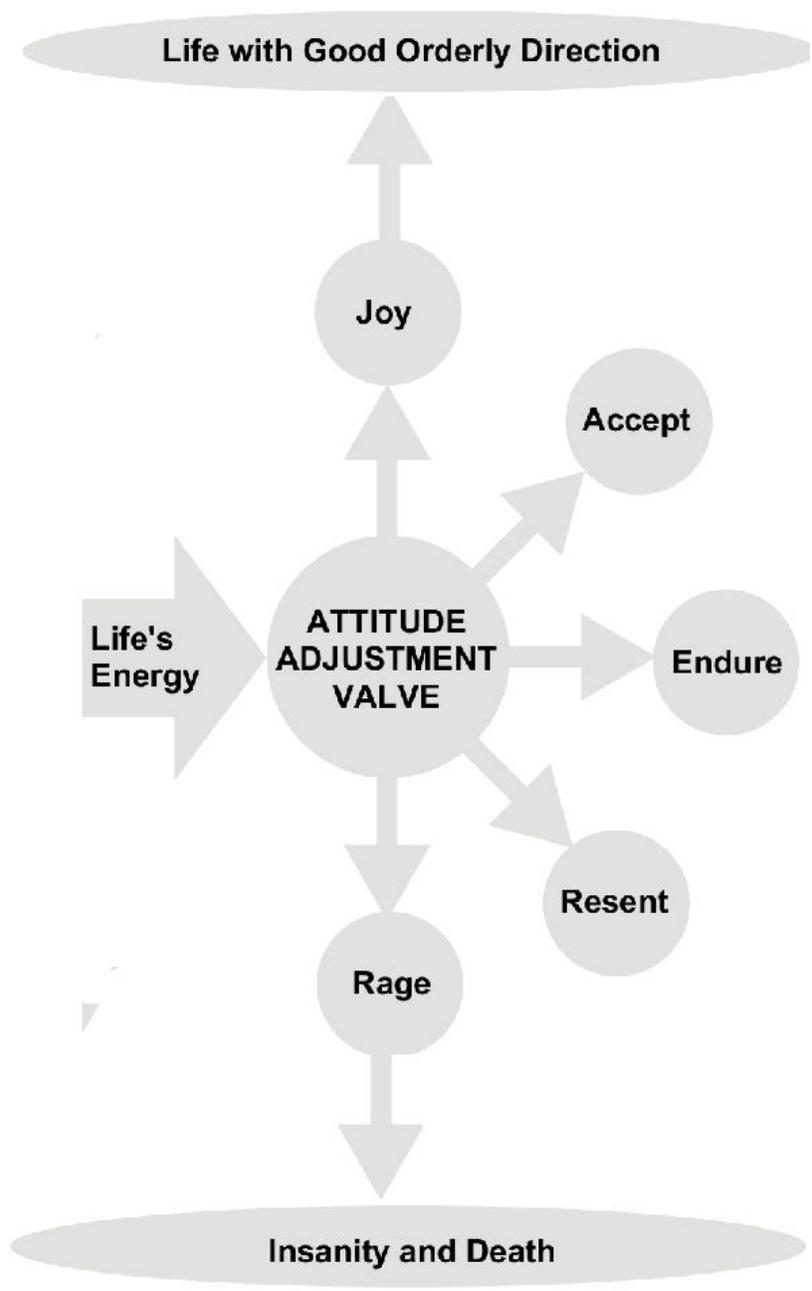
1. If I listened to my gut, I would have chased them down. Drove them off the road and killed them!
2. I could get their license and report them to the police. I’ll show them who they’re insulting and scarring. I resent that kind of behavior.
3. Just endure it and forget it. They will get theirs. What goes around comes around.
4. They're just kids. You might have done the same thing at their age, so just accept it even though you don't like it.
5. Thank God they missed me! They would have felt real badly if they hit me. They just have a lot to learn and learning is a painful process.

The particular way I respond is my choice! If I choose:

1. Fear and anger are necessary for life. However after the moment passed and the threat passed, the need for rage also passed. If I wish to have a good life, to contribute to making the world a better place, to have peace within, I will not kill someone.
2. As a good citizen I need to be responsible and report crime. I could report the kids driving recklessly and running a stop sign. However, I do not help anyone or anything if I do it with resentment. I believe a healthier way is to report them with idea of making the world a safer place.
3. To “put up with” something often means I am lazy or I do not care. These attitudes do not normally lead to a happy and fulfilling life.
4. I use acceptance to help stay on or near the path I want to be on and I have often used it as a self-defense against rage and resentment. If the only choice I have at the moment is either rage or acceptance, I found acceptance often is healthier.
5. If I live with God, **Good Orderly Direction**, in my life I will have a target that will help me direct life’s energy towards my goal.

The point is that I can choose how I will respond to life’s experiences. AA has helped me see that I have what I call an “Attitude Adjustment Valve”. I may not control what comes in but I can choose what goes out. And what goes out determines where my life is going. As I see it, there are two questions, “Where do I want to wind up in life?” And, “How do I adjust my attitude valve to get there?” Often I have no power over some person, place or thing, but I have a choice of my attitude which ultimately chooses my life’s direction.

The following is an illustration of what I have been talking about.



Paradoxes of AA

We SURRENDER TO WIN. On the face of it, surrendering certainly does not seem like winning. But it is in A.A. Only after we have come to the end of our rope, hit a stone wall in some aspect of our lives beyond which we can go no further; only when we hit “bottom” in despair and surrender, can we accomplish sobriety which we could never accomplish before. We must, and we do, surrender in order to win.

We GIVE AWAY TO KEEP IT. That seems absurd and untrue. How can you keep anything if you give it away? But in order to keep whatever it is we get in A.A., we must go about giving it away to others, for no fees or rewards of any kind. When we cannot afford to give away what we have received so freely in A.A., we had better get ready for our next “drunk.” It will happen every time. We’ve got to continue to give it away in order to keep it.

We SUFFER TO GET WELL. There is no way to escape the terrible suffering of remorse and regret and shame and embarrassment, which starts us on the road to getting well from our affliction. There is no new way to shake out a hangover. It’s painful. And for us, necessarily so. I told this to a friend of mine as he sat weaving to and fro on the side of the bed, in terrible shape, about to die for some paraldehyde. I said, “Lost John”-that’s his nickname-“Lost John, you know you’re going to have to do a certain amount of shaking sooner or later.” “Well,” he said, “for God’s sake let’s make it later!” We suffer to get well.

We DIE TO LIVE. That is a beautiful paradox straight out of the Biblical idea of being “born again” or “in losing one’s life to find it.” When we work at our Twelve Steps, the old life of guzzling and fuzzy thinking, and all that goes with it, gradually dies, and we acquire a different and a better way of life. As our shortcomings are removed, one life of us dies, and another life of us lives. We in A.A. die to live.

“THE PROFESSOR AND THE PARADOX” page 341 Second Edition, Alcoholics Anonymous

ONE FLAW IN WOMEN

By the time the Lord made woman, he was into his sixth day of working overtime. An angel appeared and said, “Why are you spending so much time on this one?”

And the Lord answered, “Have you seen my spec sheet on her? She has to be completely washable, but not plastic, have over 200 movable parts, all replaceable and able to run on diet coke and leftovers, have a lap that can hold four children at one time, have a kiss that can cure anything from a scraped knee to a broken heart and she will do everything with only two hands.”

The angel was astounded at the requirements. “Only two hands!? No way! And that’s just on the standard model? That’s too much work for one day. Wait until tomorrow to finish.”

“But I won’t,” the Lord protested. “I am so close to finishing this creation that is so close to my own heart. She already heals herself when she is sick and can work 18 hour days.”

The angel moved closer and touched the woman. “But you have made her so soft, Lord.”

“She is soft,” the Lord agreed, “but I have also made her tough. You have no idea what she can endure or accomplish.”

“Will she be able to think?” asked the angel.

The Lord replied, "Not only will she be able to think, she will be able to reason and negotiate."

The angel then noticed something, and reaching out, touched the woman's cheek. "Oops, it looks like you have a leak in this model. I told you that you were trying to put too much into this one."

"That's not a leak," the Lord corrected, "that's a tear!"

"What's the tear for?" the angel asked.

The Lord said, "The tear is her way of expressing her joy, her sorrow, her pain, her disappointment, her love, her loneliness, her grief and her pride."

The angel was impressed. "You are a genius, Lord. You thought of everything! Woman is truly amazing."

And she is! Women have strengths that amaze men. They bear hardships and they carry burdens, but they hold happiness, love and joy. They smile when they want to scream. They sing when they want to cry. They cry when they are happy and laugh when they are nervous. They fight for what they believe in. They stand up to injustice. They don't take "no" for an answer when they believe there is a better solution. They go without so their family can have. They go to the doctor with a frightened friend. They love unconditionally. They cry when their children excel and cheer when their friends get awards. They are happy when they hear about a birth or a wedding. Their hearts break when a friend dies. They grieve at the loss of a family member, yet they are strong when they think there is no strength left. They know that a hug and a kiss can heal a broken heart.

Women come in all shapes, sizes and colors. They'll drive, fly, walk, run or e-mail you to show how much they care about you. The heart of a woman is what makes the world keep turning. They bring joy, hope and love. They have compassion and ideals. They give moral support to their family and friends. Women have vital things to say and everything to give.

**HOWEVER,
IF THERE IS ONE FLAW IN WOMEN,
IT IS THAT THEY FORGET THEIR WORTH!**

Signs You May Have A Drinking Problem

1. You have to hold onto the lawn to keep from falling off the earth.
2. The back of your head keeps getting hit by the toilet seat.
3. When you can focus better with one eye closed
4. The parking lot seems to have moved while you were in the bar.
5. The glass keeps missing your mouth.
6. Vampires get woozy after biting you.
7. When vomiting becomes a relief.
8. Having a hard time staying on the side walk - left, right, stumble, fall.
9. Hi ocifer. I'm not under the affluence of incohol.
10. Waking up with a traffic cone between your legs.
11. No ocifer, I'm not drunk... you're just sober...
12. Problem? I Drink, I get Drunk, I Fall down....No Problem
13. Take me drunk, I'm home!
14. You wake up naked lying in the corner of a bus depot.
15. Don't recognize wife unless seen through bottom of bottle.
16. You drink to get over a hangover.
17. You are the proud owner of a porcelain bus driver's license.
18. I'm as jobber as a sudge!
19. Mosquitoes spiral down to the ground in circles after biting you.
20. You find yourself in a room on a train arriving in Tijuana and the last thing you remember is being in a bar in NYC!
21. You wake up in Korea in August and the last thing you remember is the Fourth of July party in Waikiki.
22. When hangovers become an attractive alternative lifestyle.
23. BeerTender! Get me another Bar!
24. Double vision so much the norm, you can't function w/o it.
25. Because you're not as think you are drunk I am.
26. Why does everybody think I have a prinking droblem?!
27. You can't remember what your family looks like... or if you have a family.
28. You get defensive when someone asks if you have drinking problem.
29. If you keep asking your wife "Where are the kids?" but you don't really have a wife and you're talking to the refrigerator.

We will know the Promises, - If we...

After working the steps for a while, Newcomers often wonder, "How do I know how well I am working the steps?" They try to follow suggestions and at the same time question their own judgment. So they can become confused. The "Promises" may be useful in pointing out the direction they need to go. If a particular promise is not being fulfilled, then we have a guide telling us what we can work on.

We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness,
— ***if we work the Steps.***

We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it,
— ***if we share our experience, strength and hope with others.***

We will comprehend the word serenity,
— ***if we practice acceptance.***

We will know peace,
— ***if we remain free of expectations.***

No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others,
— ***if we choose to become a part of the AA fellowship.***

That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear,
— ***if we pass to others the love that AA has given us.***

We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows,
— ***if we work with others.***

Self-seeking will slip away,
— ***if we practice Honesty, Openmindness and Willingness.***

Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change,
— ***if we accept God's will.***

Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us,
— ***if we learn to trust God.***

We will intuitively know how to handle situations, which used to baffle us,
— ***if we learn to use the spiritual set of tools AA has given us.***

We will realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves,
— ***if we have a spiritual awakening as result of doing the Steps.***

Quotes

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear." (Ambrose Redmoon)

"Don't be afraid to take a big step. You can't cross a chasm in two small jumps." (David Lloyd George)

"Drinking gave me the illusion that I might be alive." (Chekhov, Uncle Vanya)

"Everyone is kneaded out of the same dough but not baked in the same oven." (Yiddish proverb)

"Go often to the house of thy friend, for weeds choke the unused path." (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

"God will heal your broken heart, if you give Him all the pieces." (Teresa)

"He then learns that in going down into the secrets of his own mind he has descended into the secrets of all minds." (Emerson)

"I used to shoot up and throw up, now I suit up and show up." (David F.)

"It is easier to get forgiveness than permission." (Cecile Stewart)

"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great." (Mark Twain)

"My sobriety depends on who God is, not who I am." (Duane M.)

"Now that I'm sober I hit my knees in a different way than I used to." (Jay)

"Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present." (Albert Camus)

"Seven days without a meeting makes one weak." (Herb B.)

"Regarding hanging out in bars: 'If you hang out at a barbershop long enough you're bound to get a haircut.'" (Bill G.)

"The greatest good you can do for another is not just share your riches, but reveal to them their own." (Disraeli)

"The worst of all deceptions is self-deception." (Plato)

"When I live in the past, I live in regret. When I live in the future, I live in fear. When I stay in the NOW, everything's always okay." (Joan T.)

"When you choose the lesser of two evils, always remember that it is still an evil." (Max Lerner)

"Work to become, not to acquire." (Elbert Hubbard)

"Yes, you can be a dreamer and a doer too, if you will remove one word from your vocabulary: "IMPOSSIBLE ." (Robert Schuller)

"You cannot save your ass and your face at the same time." (Dennis K.)

I am always willing to learn, however I do not always like to be taught. (Winston Churchill)

The value of the average conversation could be enormously improved by the constant use of four simple words: "I do not know." (Andre Maurois)

"The three great requirements for a happy life are:
something to do,
something to love,
something to hope for."
(Joseph Addison)

Remember:Alcoholics Anonymous works for people who believe in God.
Alcoholics Anonymous works for people who do NOT believe in God.
Alcoholics Anonymous does not work for people who believe they ARE God.
(Anonymous)

WATER

Water is everywhere and in all living things - we cannot be separated from water. No water, no life. Period. Water comes in many forms - liquid, vapor, ice, snow, fog, rain, hail. But no matter the form, it's still water.

Human beings give this stuff many names in many languages, in all its forms. It's crazy to argue over what its true name is. Call it what you will, there is no difference to the water. It is what it is.

Human beings drink water from many containers - cups, glasses, jugs, skins, their own hands, whatever. To argue about which container is proper for the water is crazy. The container doesn't change the water.

Some like it hot, some like it cold, some like it iced, some fizzy, some with stuff mixed in with it - like tea, coffee, whatever. No matter. It does not change the nature of the water.

Never mind the name or the cup or the mix. These are not important. What we have in common is thirst. Thirst for the water of Life! ***As it is with water, so it is with God.***

By Robert Fulghum, wrote, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten."

To "let go"

- it means I can't do it for someone else.
 - it's the realization I can't control another.
 - to allow learning from natural consequences.
 - is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.
 - is not to try to change or blame another
 - is not to care for, but to care about.
 - is not to fix, but to be supportive.
 - is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being.
 - is not to arrange outcomes, but to allow others to affect their own destinies.
 - is not to be protective, it's to permit another to face reality.
 - is not to deny, but to accept.
 - is not to criticize and regulate anybody but to try to become what I dream I can be.
 - is not to regret the past, but to grow and live for the future.
 - is to fear less, and love more.
 - is not to adjust everything to my desires but to take each day as it comes, and cherish myself in it.
-

Reciprocal Principal.

I have found the following to be often true.

How I relate to others is how others will relate to me.
How I relate to others is how I will also relate to me.

The more I accept others, the more others accept me.
The more I accept others, the more I accept me.

The more I judge others, the more others judge me.
The more I judge others, the more I judge me.

The more I forgive others, the more others forgive me.
The more I forgive others, the more I forgive me.

The more I care about others, the more others care about me.
The more I care about others, the more I care about me.

In general, how I relate to others is how others will relate to me, and how I will relate to me. Awareness of this principle helps move from a ME centered life to a WE centered life. WE plug into the human race, and WE become a healthy member of the human race.

Slips of the Tongue Heard at Meetings

Our leaders are but trusted *serpents*.

Our leaders are but *twisted* servants.

Came to believe that our *wives* had become unmanageable.

Please help me start this meeting with a moment of *violence*, followed by the serenity prayer!!

Sought through prayer and *medication* to improve our conscious contact with GOD.

Came to believe that a *powder* greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

...and c) that God could and would if he were *sober*

...and the result was nil until we let go of the *Absolut*.

...lest problems of money, *puberty*, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

Made a searching and *fearful* moral inventory of ourselves.

That feeling of *usefulness* and self-pity will disappear.

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or their *mothers*.

... God could and would if he wore *socks*!

[missing words are in brackets]

Rarely have we seen a [fail] person who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do [not], recover...

We are like men who have lost their legs . . . we never [grow new ones] *have to buy a pair of shoes again*.

Recovery Tools

Don't Drink, Don't Drug: Foundation of recovery.

Meetings: Members share their experience, strength and hope in recovery. Meetings can identify common problems and help find solutions.

Prayer: The Serenity Prayer can be used to help see what we can't do, and what we can do. There are many helpful prayers available. Talk to others to see what they use. Early in recovery, some have found it useful to begin the day with, "Help." and end with, "Thanks."

Get a Sponsor: Sponsors are members who have worked the Twelve Steps and are willing to share their experience. Find a member who has the recovery you want, and ask that person to show how they are achieving it by working the steps.

Work the Twelve Steps with a sponsor: This is the basic program of recovery.

Phone: The telephone helps us stay connected to the program daily. We share one-to-one and avoid isolation. We learn to reach out, ask for help and extend help to others.

Practice Honesty: Before recovery, many are in denial (Didn't Even Know I Am lying), thus there is a need to practice honesty with others and ourselves. Honesty can get better with practice and become a useful tool for living a better life.

Service: Carrying the message to the one who still suffers is the basic purpose of the Fellowship. We are encouraged to do what we can when we can. Any form of service, which helps someone, is valuable.

Journal: Putting our thoughts and feelings down on paper helps us to better understand our actions and reactions.

Read and Study Recovery Literature: Alcoholics Anonymous, and The 12 Steps and 12 Traditions are where to begin the process, and there are many other useful publications.

Use the Internet: There are many web sites that offer additional Recovery information. Contacts with others in Recovery can be maintained with emails and social networking.

Remember HOW it works: We often become people we want to be when we learn to be **Honest**, practice **Open-mindedness** and are **Willing** to do what is necessary for recovery

Remember HALT: When we become too **Hungry**, too **Angry**, too **Lonely** and/or too **Tried**, often we become people we do not want to be and do things we regret.

We are what we are fed

I believe we are made up of four components:

1. Physical
2. Mental
3. Emotional
4. Spiritual

Who we become is determined by how we feed these components.

For example, when I drank

- Physically my hands would shake.
- Mentally, I had difficulty remembering what happened; I had black outs.
- Emotionally, I felt like a wasted human being. I was often angry and fearful.
- I ignored my spiritually and my conscience was put to sleep by alcohol.

When I stopped drinking I needed to replace each of those with something else.

- Physically, I drank coffee and lots of it.
- Mentally, I needed to learn the HOW of AA, (Honesty, Openmindness and Willingness.)
- Emotionally, others cared for me until I began to learn how to care for myself.
- Spiritually, I had to recognize I was not GOD and I needed help from something outside of myself. I needed to find a Higher Power.

Today

- Physically, I drink less coffee.
- Mentally, I continue to learn and practice what I have learned in AA.
- Emotionally, I can be caring, loving and lovable.
- Today my spiritually has gone from a Me thing to a We thing. There is a strong sense of connection with others and being plugged into the program that feeds my spiritually.

Today, and everyday, I have to ask myself, "What am I filling myself with?" Fear and Anger or Love and Compassion? What am I putting into me today? Is it love or fear? Is it life or death? Is it AA or alcohol? Is it a desire to stop drinking or to have a drink? Am I growing or dying? Am I focused on others or on me?

I am very Grateful to you, the people of AA, for helping me find the right diet for living and enjoying the life I have today. Words are not adequate to express the Gratitude that I have, but I will say, "Thank you very much and I hope to pass on to others the gifts I have been given."

"Slow Down Therapy"

1. Slow down; you are not responsible for doing it all yourself.
2. Remember a happy, peaceful time in your past. Rest there.
3. Set your own pace. When someone is pushing you, it's OK to tell them they're pushing.
4. Take nothing for granted: watch water flow, the leaves blow, your neighbor mow.
5. Taste your food. God gives it to delight and nourish.
6. Notice the sun and the moon as they rise and set.
7. Quit planning how you're going to use what you know, learn, or possess. God's gifts just are.
8. When you talk with someone, don't think about what you'll say next.
9. Talk and play with children. It will bring out the unhurried little person inside you.
10. Create a place in your home...at your work...in your heart...where you can go for quiet and recollection.
11. Allow yourself time to be lazy and unproductive. Rest isn't luxury; it's a necessity.
12. Listen to the wind blow. It carries a message of yesterday and tomorrow-and now.
13. Rest on your laurels. They bring comfort whatever their size, age, or condition.
14. Talk slower. Talk less. Don't talk. Communication isn't measured by words.
15. Give yourself permission to be late sometimes. Life is for living, not scheduling.
16. Listen to the song of a bird; the complete song. Music and nature are gifts, but only if you are willing to receive them.
17. Take time just to think. Action is good and necessary, but it's fruitful only if we muse, ponder, and mull.
18. Make time for play-the things you like to do. Whatever your age, your inner child needs re-creation.
19. Watch and listen to the night sky. It speaks.
20. Listen to the words you speak, especially in prayer.
21. Learn to stand back and let others take their turn as leaders.
22. Divide big jobs into little jobs. If God took six days to create the universe, can you hope to do any better?
23. When you find yourself rushing and anxious, stop. Ask yourself "WHY?" you are rushing and anxious.
24. Take time to read. Thoughtful reading is enriching reading.
25. Direct your life with purposeful choices, not with speed and efficiency.
26. Take a day off alone; make a retreat. You can learn from monks and hermits without becoming one.
27. Pet a furry friend. You will give and get the gift of now.
28. Work with your hands. It frees the mind.
29. Take time to wonder. Without wonder, life is merely existence.
30. Sit in the dark. It will teach you to see and hear, taste and smell.
31. Let go. Nothing is usually the hardest thing to do - but often it is the best.
32. Take a walk-but don't go anywhere. If you walk just to get somewhere, you sacrifice the walking.
33. Count your friends. If you have one, you are lucky. If you have more, you are blessed. Bless them in return.
34. Count your blessings - one at a time, slowly.

Speaker's Meetings Topics and Stories

AA Gives You Days To Your Life & Life To Your Days

AA Is Not A Self-Help But A Help Others Program

Adult Spouse Of An Al-Anon

Alcohol Makes You Do Things You Don't Want To

An Ex-Con Now Is Superintendent Of Rehab In Prison

Anxiety Was Drug Of Choice

Can't Live Like A Drunk And Expect To Stay Sober

Do The Right Thing And Right Action Will Happen

Don't Confuse What You Did, With What You Are

Don't Quit Before The Miracle Happens

Drank Epsom Salts, Beer, And Wine (41 Yrs AA)

Drank So Much Old Crow She Looks Like One

Drank Vanilla Extract, Nyquil And Scope

Fear And Pain Were Her Motivators

Fear With Faith Is Courage

His Hair Was Happy

Just Follow Directions & Find God (40+ Yrs AA)

Life In Sobriety Doesn't Fall Apart It Falls Together

Life Was Shades Of Gray

Most Common 3 Words: "My Sponsor Said"

Sobriety Keys: Fellowship, Understanding, Faith, Love

The Goal Is To Live Sober, Not Die Sober

The Highest You Can Go In AA Is Sober

The Problem Is That You Can't Fix Yourself

The Steps Don't Work Until You Do Them

Toughest Pain: To Be Less Than You Can Be (40 Yrs AA)

Used Ambulance As A Taxi (75 Yrs Old)

Wanted In 2 States Not Wanted In 48 (an Ol'timer)
Wanted To Drink Out Of Flower Pots
Wanted To See Double & Feel Single
Was Pronounced Dead From Ethyl Alcohol (90 Yrs Old)
We Are Strong When We Admit Our Weaknesses
Would Go Through Others Medicine Chest
Would Hallucinate When He Drank
You Make God Laugh By Telling Him Your Plans

Thoughts, Ideas heard at Meetings or from Friends or the Internet etc.

...give us 90 days and if you do not like it your misery will be refunded

A fear faced is a fear erased.

AA is like the Mafia: if you leave, you die.

AA is not a program to get sober...it is a program to live life successfully and to be happy once you get sober.

AA is not for people who need it, it is for people who want it.

Acceptance without gratitude is bullshit.

An expectation is a premeditated resentment.

Be careful what you pray for, you just might get it.

Being an alcoholic does not give me the excuse to act alcoholically.

Bring the body and the mind follows.

Change only happens when the pain of holding on is greater than the fear of letting go.

Courage is fear in action.

Fear knocked on my door...I opened it and there was nobody there.

First the man takes a drink, then the drink takes a drink, then the drink takes the man.

From a discussion on "why did you come to AA" "I found myself on the road to hell with no idea of how to get off."

God will do for me what I cannot do for myself. It is my experience that God will NOT do for me what I CAN do for myself

Have a nice day unless you have made other plans.

Have you ever had one of those days when your ego just eats your brain?!?

Having a resentment is like drinking poison and expecting someone else to die.

I am an egomaniac with an inferiority complex.

I am not going to give anybody free rent in my head.

I am one drink away from never being sober again for the rest of my life.

I asked my sponsor, "What do you do when you finish working the Steps?" Without batting an eye, he replied, "You lie really still, because you're dead!"

I came to Alcoholics Anonymous because I knew that if I drank it was going to kill me, and if I did not drink I was going to die.

I can not start doing what is right until I stop doing what is wrong.

I did not get my life back in this program..I got my life for the first time.

I go to AA because there are people there who care about me for no reason, and they help me to live a better life.

I have a very high pain threshold and a very low fear threshold.

I have definitely got the ism in alcoholism...that"s Incredibly Short Memory.

I heard someone say, "take what you like and leave the rest." My sponsor leaned over and said, "You better take it all, "cause you do not know what you"ll need."

I may not be what I ought to be, and I may not be what I wanna be, but thanks to God and Alcoholics Anonymous, I am not what I used to be!

I need to put things in perspective because I have a disease of perception.

I think that God gets alcoholics sober because He needs a rest!

I told my sponsor that my problem was that I am a people pleaser. He asked me how many people were pleased that I had slept with their wife, puked in their garden, and smashed into their car.

I was a scream in search of a mouth.

If everything is coming your way, you are in the wrong lane.

If it does not matter, it does not matter.

If you are not moving away from a drink you are moving closer to it.

If you can not love everybody today, at least try not to hurt anybody.

If you commit suicide you are killing the wrong person.

If you continually give you will continually have.

If you do not want what we have, go back out to what you had.

If you do not want what we have, we will cheerfully refund your misery.

If you share your pain you cut it in half, if you do not you double it.

In an email from a sponsee to her sponsor: "I want you to know, I did NOT punch him in the nose. I prayed for him... to walk in front of a fast bus."

ISM: Insane Self Management

It is not the load that breaks you down...it is the way you carry it.

Maintaining sobriety is like feeding a parking meter. It is all about change.

My basic problem is that I flee from those who want me and I pursue the rejectors.

My biggest problem was bottles of the two-legged variety.

My head is like a bad neighborhood and I should not go there alone.

My mind is out to get me.

My sponsor had me take actions I didn't understand ... and ... I got results that I didn't think were possible!

My sponsor told me that in the first year of my sobriety I could have all of the sex I wanted and that after my first birthday I could even involve another person.

On relapse: "I never did anything in moderation...except maybe the steps."

On the hopelessness of addiction from somebody who is still using: "I used to think there was light at the end of the tunnel, but for me today the light is on a locomotive headed right for me."

Praying is asking God for help, meditating is listening for God's answer.

Regarding believing in God: Pretend. Act as if. Fake it until you make it.

Relapse starts long before the drink is drunk.

Religion is for people who are afraid they will go to hell. Spirituality is for people who have been there.

The back of the AA meeting room is the "Shoe Department." That's where we find the slippers and loafers.

The first step identifies the problem, the remaining eleven steps are the solution.

The most important word in the Steps is the first one... "WE"

The one thing that is more painful than learning from experience is NOT learning from experience!

The only way to have gratitude is to live in the now, not in the past or the future.

The power behind me is greater than the problem in front of me.

The quality of your recovery is proportional to the quality of your surrender.

The reason I am here is because I am not all there.

The secret to long term sobriety: Do not drink, do not die.

The shortest sentence in the Big Book is, "It Works".

The thirteenth step is a combination of the first step and the twelfth step: "My life is unmanageable. I want to share it with you!"

The world ain't gonna kiss my butt just because I am getting sober.

There is no elevator, you have to take the steps.

This program changes the way I relate to me. That is what I am trying to do, change the way I relate to me.

This was a spiritual awakening! I suddenly discovered that when my gratitude list increases, my "bitch list" gets shorter.

Those who relapse are attending powerlessness graduate school.

We are attracted to people who share in our growth and progress and lose interest in those who do not.

We are sick people trying to get better, not bad people trying to be good.

What other people think of you is none of your business.

When I balked at sharing the stuff on my fourth step with my sponsor she suggested, "Let's not worry about getting you into heaven, first let's just get you out of hell."

When you are home by yourself you are behind enemy lines.

When you are in fear you are not in faith.

You are not responsible for your disease, but you are responsible for your behavior.

You can not direct the wind, but you can adjust your sails.

If I wanted a good chance at successful recovery, I had to make sobriety my number one priority.

Many meetings	Many Chances
Few Meetings	Few Chances
No Meetings	No Chances

Faith	To believe in something without proof.
Hope	The feeling that the future will be better
Charity	To love without condition.

Patience with others is Love,
Patience with self is Hope,

Patience with God is Faith.

God did NOT make us complete. He left the finishing job up to us. It is important to remember that, our thoughts become our actions, our actions become our habits, our habits become our character [with and without defects depending upon how we choose to live] and our character becomes our destiny.

People full of booze, can't see ... GOD, that is Good Orderly Direction
People full of anger, have a hard time seeing GOOD, that is GOD in others

AA Acronyms

AA = Adventurers Anonymous

AA = Altered Attitudes

AA = Attitude Adjustment

ABC = Acceptance, Belief, Change

ABC = Ashtrays, Broom, Coffee (or Chairs)

ACTION = Any Change Toward Improving One's Nature

ASK = Ass-Saving Kit

BAR = Beware Alcohol, Run

BAR = Beware Alcoholic Ruin

DEAD = Drinking Ends All Dreams

DENIAL = Don't Even Notice I Am Lying

DETACH = Don't Even Think About Changing Him/Her

EGO = Easing God Out

EGO = Edging God Out

FAILURE = Fearful, Arrogant, Insecure, Lonely, Uncertain, Resentful, Empty

FEAR = Failure Expected And Received

FEAR = False Evidence Appearing Real

FEAR = False Expectations Appearing Real

FEAR = Fear Expressed Allows Relief

FEAR = Feelings Every Alcoholic Rejects

FEAR = Forget Everything and Run (polite version)

FEAR = F_K Everything and Run! (Not recommended--it's what we used to do)

FEAR = Face Everything and Recover! (Definitely recommended)

FEAR = Frantic Effort to Appear Real

FEAR = Frantic Efforts to Appear Recovered

FINE = Faithful, Involved, knowledgeable and Experienced

FINE = Feeling Insecure, Numb and Empty

FINE = Frantic, Insane, Nuts and Egotistical

FINE = Freaked out, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional

FINE = Frustrated, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional

FINE = F--ked, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional

GOD = Good Orderly Direction

GOD = Group of Drunks

GOYA = Get Off Your Ass

HALT = Honestly, Actively, Lovingly Tolerant

HALT = Hope, Acceptance, Love and Tolerance

HALT = Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired: Fix these situations before you make any decisions.

HALT = Horny, Arrogant, Lazy and Tragic: if you're any one of these, get to a meeting!

HELP = Hope, Encouragement, Love and Patience

HOPE = Humor, Optimism, Patience, Effort

HOPE = Happy Our Program Exists

HOPE = Hearing Other Peoples' Experience
HOPE = Hang On! Peace Exists...
HOW = Honest, Open-minded and Willing
ISM = I, Self, Me
ISM = Incredibly Short Memory
ISM = In Side Me
ISM = I Sabotage Myself
KISS = Keep It Simple, Stupid
KISS = Keep It Simple, Smartly
KISS = Keep It Simple, Sugar
KISS = Keep It Simple, Sweetheart
KISS = Keeping It Simple, Spiritually
MMM = Meetings, Meditation and Masturbation (recommended for the first year)
NUTS = Not Using The Steps
OUR = Openly Using Recovery
PACE = Positive Attitudes Change Everything
PAID = Pitiful And Incomprehensible Demoralization
PMS = Poor Me Syndrome
PROGRAM = People Relying on God Relaying a Message
RID = Restless, Irritable and Discontented
SLIP = Sobriety Loses Its Priority
SOB = Sober Old Bag
SOB = Sober Old Bastard
SOB = Sober Old Biker
SOB = Sober Old Bitch
SOBER = Son Of A Bitch, Everything's Real
SPONSOR = Sober Person Offering Newcomers Suggestions On Recovery
STEPS = Solutions To Every Problem in Sobriety
STEPS = Solutions To Every Problem, Sober
STOP = Sicker Than Other People
TIME = Things I Must Earn
YET = You're Eligible Too

Introduction: Working the 12 Steps

To begin with, read the books *Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions with the guidance of a Sponsor.*

Look for the real meaning of the Steps to gain an understanding of the process. What are the 12 Steps? The 12 Steps are **a suggested program of recovery** found in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The goal of the 12 Steps is to have a Spiritual Awakening. Many Newcomers are looking to stop dying and find a better way of living. Working the 12 Steps have helped many find that better way to live.

I did not like working the Steps, but after doing them I found each Step helped me find a better direction for living. I needed to make the Steps part of who I was, my bones, blood and flesh. I wove the Steps into my daily existence by looking for ways to apply them in everyday matters. Life doesn't come with a book of instructions, so it is easy to make mistakes along the path of life. We were not made complete, and the finishing job is up to us. Our choices today determine who we are tomorrow. Our feelings and thoughts become our behavior, our behavior becomes our patterns, our patterns become our practice and our practice becomes our way of living.

One of the results of denial is that we hide part of who we are from ourselves. Hopefully by working the Steps you can meet a new friend, yourself. You will no longer need to hide from yourself. Rather than running from or to something outside ourselves, we learn how to come into our own existence from our inside. We become what we want to be, can be and were meant to be.

I believe that each person has to find their own way through the Steps. It is easy to see what I mean when we speak of the Fourth Step. Each person has their own unique Fourth Step; no two Fourth Steps are exactly the same. However, I believe this is also true for all the Steps, not just the Fourth. When I share my experience in working the Steps, **please remember it is my experience**. You may or may not relate to it. Either way is OK. I offer my experience not as a method to be followed, but rather as a simple illustration of one person's path through the 12 Steps.

The way I present some of my experiences working the Steps may appear to be straightforward and flowing in one direction. **It was NOT that way at all!** Often it felt like I would move forward a couple of steps and then take a backward step. There were distractions, bumps in the road, and many disagreements with my sponsor, Jack H.. That was all part of my 12 Step process.

Steps train us to be a new person, living a new life. We become aware of what we do and what we could do.

The process goes from ME to WE existence.

I did not accept the 12 Steps blindly. I needed to understand and make them my own by living them. I believe each individual has to work out his own personal recovery. We can and do help one another to find ways to that personal recovery, but personal recovery is something you yourself can only find within. ***We alone are capable of experiencing who we are.***

Step One. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.

I had difficulty with two words, **powerless** and **unmanageable**. Powerless meant I had no control, and I believed I still had some control. The word unmanageable was difficult because I had a good job, a wife and a home. I really wanted to work the Step and at the same time to be honest. I was not getting it. I would wake up in the morning and remind myself I was on Step 1. Through out the day I

would try to apply the Step 1 to my daily experiences. For example: I needed to take a bus for an important meeting. The bus was late. (Powerless over the bus' arrival time.) I was upset because I was going to be late. (unmanageable life). I was also doing what my Sponsor, Jack H, told me to do, and yet did not honestly believe I done Step 1. After weeks of reading, doing the work and applying the First Step to daily life, the meaning of the word powerless changed for me. It went from no control to lost control (I could not predict what would happen when I took that first drink). The meaning of the word unmanageable now meant that I was not living the life I wanted to live, I was not who I wanted to be. At this point I felt I did Step 1.

There were useful results for me in working the Step 1. I began to realize I had very little control over persons, places or things. I also found I had only a little control over me. My body told me when I was hungry, sleepy and so on. I had some control over sleeping, eating etc, but I could not completely stop sleeping, eating, etc. even if I wanted to. When I consider how difficult it is to change myself, I understand what little chance I have of trying to change others! I also became aware that **if I tried to control something I was powerless over, my life became manageable.** I wasted a lot of time, effort and life itself when I tried to change the unchangeable.

Step Two: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Before AA I was afraid I was going to die before I ever lived. Alcohol was controlling my life. I was hooked and there was nothing I could do about it. Yet on the outside I acted as if I had a handle on everything, while on the inside I was dying. I had addictive insanity. Part of that insanity is Denial (Didn't Even Notice I Am Lying), and doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. There were many times I said, "This time will be different," but it wasn't. I lied to others and myself about who I was, and image was more important than truth. **I recognized I had a problem that I could not solve on my own.** Before I could become sane, I needed to become clean and free from alcohol. I needed help. I went to AA.

At many meetings I heard "a Power greater than ourselves" referred to as God. Even though at one time I was considering becoming a priest, I found the word "God" in this sense to be too distracting for me. That word used in that way brought up too many unanswered questions. I needed to find a practical and useful concept of power to help me deal with my alcoholism. I came to believe a sober Group Of Drunks (a.k.a. GOD) has more power against my first drink, than I would alone. The shared AA experience is a greater than my experience alone. I go to AA to help my ME power become part of the WE power. The WE power does not get rid of the ME power, but rather it enhances the ME power beyond what I could do alone. I am responsible for my sobriety, and I need to participate in my own recovery, **but not alone.**

Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

I had difficulty with this Step and spent months on it. The results were very useful and life changing for me. I believe there will be some in AA who feel I missed the point of this Step. I take no issue with that view. I believe we need to be true to ourselves. I need to be honest with myself.

When I began Step 3 I had no God that I understood. My understanding and concept of God evolved as I worked Step 3. ***Today, my concept of God is anything that helps me become who I was meant to be.*** I found this to be a practical and useful concept of power within the context of recovery. This is the concept I understand when I use the word "God" in the discussion of the Steps. This can be something outside of me like a sponsor or something I needed to hear at a meeting or something I needed to read or even someone I needed to help. It can also be something inside of me like, honesty, love, understanding which I need to nurture for growth.

I believe my wants are expressions of my will. I also believe my wants lead to "bondage of self." My wants can tie me up in knots. Often I have wants that are in conflict with each other at the same time. I want to be in good shape, but I do not want to exercise. I want to be at a healthy weight and I want to over eat. I want to have money, but I do not want to work for it. Before working the Steps, my wants were driving me nuts! ***What do I want? Instant gratification! When do I want it? Now!*** I had no real direction in life. If I was going to live a better life, I needed some other power to guide my wants.

OK, I was beginning to get it. I needed to align my will (wants) with God's will (God's wants for me). But how do I know God's will? It was serendipity (or if you prefer, Grace) that two things happened on the same day. I was reading about Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" and went to a meeting and heard about GOD being **Good Orderly Direction**.

Maslow observed that human needs have different levels of value. You can do without food longer than you can without water. Thus thirst is a "stronger" need than hunger. On the other hand if you were dying of thirst and suffocating at the same time, you need to breathe first and then drink. Maslow called this ordering a "Hierarchy of Needs."

Needs start at the very basic Animal level of existence and go to the top God-like level of existence. The first task is to work at satisfying the needs of the level we are on and then move on to the next level and so on. Say if 80 to 90% of our Survival needs (food, water, warmth, etc.) are met we can go on to addressing the needs of the next level, Security. If 80 to 90% of those needs are met we can go on to the next level, Social. Needs are dynamic; they change with time. They can come and go and come back. We need to breathe all the time to survive. We need to have food and water daily to be physically healthy. Once we have achieved a higher level of existence does not mean we will always be at a higher level. For example, if we are in a major disaster, we will probably be addressing the Survival and/or Security needs for some time even though we had reached higher level earlier.

A life driven only by Wants can be unstable and disappointing. My life is determined by my behavior, and my behavior needs direction. A goal that gives meaningful direction to life is important to healthy wholesome person. It gives purpose, fulfillment and satisfaction in life. I do not believe that turning "our lives" over means we have no responsibility or no free will. My responsibility is to care for my needs. Do the work I am responsible for and let God take care of the results. Accept the results, move on, and then do the next "right thing." Life is more satisfying and fulfilling if there is direction in our life, and if our Wants and Needs are aligned with God, Good Orderly Direction.

Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" were modified and applied to the Third Step. The concept of Good Orderly Direction (aka the next right thing) was added.



Needs and Wants can be confused with each other. A Need is a condition required for a given level of existence. Needs are like the 12 Steps, there is order to them. A Want appears to be more spontaneous, whimsical and impulsive that has its origins in feelings. A Want may or may not have order associated with it. You may want to smoke a cigarette, but you do not need to smoke a cigarette. If I am drowning, I might say, "I need air." or "I want air." They appear to be the same statement, but in reality we are saying, "I need air to survive." versus. "I want air to feel better." There are differences between Needs and Wants.

A healthy person often knows what they need and where they are going. An alcoholic may want a drink rather than recognizing the need for food. An addict may want a fix, rather than recognizing the need for help. An overly shy person may want isolation, rather than recognizing the need to be with others. A lazy person may want to do nothing, rather than recognizing the need for action. An obese person may want to eat more, rather than recognizing the need for self-control.

I am not spiritually self sufficient. Thus, I need to work within self and be open to GOD, Good Orderly Direction. My understanding of Step Tree became. I need to remember the results are not up to me, but a "higher power." ***I am NOT in charge of the results.***

My understanding of Step three: Made a decision (*not just once but all the time*) to turn our will (*my wants*) and our lives (*my behavior*) over to the care of God (*Good Orderly Direction, that is, to do the next right thing*) as we understand (in the present) him.

Step Four. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

In the Fourth Step I needed to find what behavior worked or did not work, and why I chose that behavior. What was I doing that lead me away from the life I wanted to live? What was I doing to stop me from living a better life? Most of us like to forget behaviors that we regret. We have also been taught not to sing our own praises. The result is that we rarely look inside of ourselves to find the deep sources of our behavior. Most of our lives, we see the source of our problems outside of ourselves. We are now asked to look inside of ourselves . We are asked to look honestly, without judgment and fear to find what made us “tick.”

I made a list memorable events or patterns in my life that I could remember, and recalled them in detail. I looked for my weakness, limitations and strengths. I used different items to help with the recall.

Significant subjects

- Fears
- Anger / Resentments
- Sexual conduct / misconduct
- Love
- Gratitude

Significant people

- Family
- Friends
- Associates
- Others (people, places and/or institutions)

Significant times

- School
- Marriage
- Work
- Other

An item was broken up into four columns for analysis:

Column 1 Date(s) and Name of Event or Behavior Pattern

Column 2 Detailed Description of the Event or Behavior Pattern

Column 3 Answers to the Questions:

- What do I regret?
- What am I glad about?
- How did I make my world a poorer or better place?
- What would I change if I could?

Column 4 Exact Nature (one word or a very short phrase)

I needed to take some time here to really see what was going on with me. I had to find what was behind my behavior. What was I really trying to do or accomplish? What were my feelings and thoughts? Was my behavior premeditated or impulsive? Was it ego, compassion, resentment, selfishness, love, anger, fear, jealousy, control, etc.? I tried to find one word or a very short phrase that would describe the source of my behavior. I had to honestly look inside of myself without judgment. I was not looking to blame or praise, I was looking for understanding as to why I did what I did.

Step Five. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

I needed someone to check my work Fourth Step work and to help me make sense of what I did. My sponsor, Jack H., rejected my first effort. I wrote an autobiography of about 200 pages. That was not an inventory. Jack sent me to some of his other sponsees to learn how to do it right. They recommended following the "Joe and Charlie" format which I did. I was in recovery over two years before I finally finished my Fourth Step Inventory, and did my Fifth Step with Jack. Jack and I burned my inventory in his backyard barbecue to leave the past in the past. I regretted doing this when I worked on my Eighth Step. I do not recommend doing this.

Step Five was very important in helping me go from a **ME** program to a **WE** program. Step Five was a humbling experience. I had to honestly share dark deep secrets with another person. This helped reduce ego and false pride. Step Five was a liberating experience. I no longer was carrying that bag of garbage and feeling alone. Alone I felt I was losing control of my life. Now I began to feel the power of **WE**. I felt a kind of spiritual inspiration. There was help for me to better control my life. Jack offered some constructive criticism. He showed how I used anger as a tool of my alcoholism, and how I kept people away from me by isolating and negativity. He believed the root cause, "exact nature", of my difficulties in life was fear. If we dug deep enough when looking at some problem I had, we would find fear.

I was afraid of not being good enough, of making a mistake, of hurting someone, of being found out, of being a phony, and so on and so forth. My problems began with my reaction to fear. I would deny it, or run from it, or try to beat it down with anger. I was reacting to fear and **not facing it**. If I faced fear and checked things out, I would probably have fewer problems or at least smaller ones.

Before the Fourth and Fifth Steps, I would ask myself, "Why did you do that?" and too often the answer would be, "I don't know." After working these Steps, it was as if a door was opened and I was meeting myself for the first time in my life. I shared my inventory with God with gratitude for the gift of this new vision.

When we shared our Fourth Step with another, we were open to their observations, advice and direction. We began to learn how to trust. We also learned that secrets help to keep us sick. Denial and Isolation are habits of drinking/drugging that lead to self destruction.

To help us deal with our future, we admitted to God the exact nature of our wrongs.

To deal with our denial, we admitted to ourselves the exact nature of our wrongs.

To deal with our isolation, we admitted to another the exact nature of our wrongs.

Step Six "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

Step 4 dealt with past behavior. Step Six deals with present behavior. I looked for my "bad" habits. Bad in the sense that they they keep me from becoming who I wanted to be. In Step 4, I began to develop and use a tool of self examination. In Step 6 I used this tool to look at my self-defeating behaviors and their consequences. Those behaviors were stopping me from becoming the person I wanted to be and the life I wanted to live.

I am a human and the path I am designed for is a human path. I have suffered when I have chosen to go off that path. For example, if I am hiking in the mountains my chances of not suffering are better if I stay on the footpath. Furthermore, if I chose to act like a bird, rather than a human, and jump off the side of the mountain, my chances are pretty good that I will suffer, if not die. So it is with my alcoholism/addiction, if I chose to act as if I am not alcoholic/addict, my chances are pretty good that

I will suffer, if not die. I was given drives so that I could survive, reproduce, eat when hungry, sleep when tired, and so on. Sometimes my drives lead me off the path when they were not controlled.

In Step 6 I look at my weaknesses that could lead me off that path. These weaknesses have many names, "defects of character", "shortcomings", vices, bad habits, etc. Call it what you want. It is whatever leads me off that path and into suffering. Pain tells me I am going in the wrong direction. If I do not learn a right direction, I may repeat the painful process many times over until I learn a right direction.

What are character defects?

Behavior that leads me away from the life I want to live, and the person I want to be.

How do you find them?

Learn to pay attention to all behavior and their consequences. Be aware of the effect that drives have upon behavior

The following is a partial list of life drives that can lead me off that healthy path of life.

Pride is self adoration. I am better or worse than you. I am different, special and you are not.

Greed is an excessive desire to possess more. I want what others have without working for it.

Gluttony is excess in eating or drinking. I consume more than I need.

Lust is an intense desire or craving for pleasure. I want more pleasure from another.

Anger is strong feeling of ill will towards someone or something. I want it my way, and I want full control.

Envy is a desire to have something that is possessed by another. I should have what you have instead of you.

Laziness is not taking appropriate action. I do not want to change.

Fear is an emotion of alarm caused by an expectation of danger or pain. I react without thinking or faith.

Impatience is irritation with anything that causes delay. I want my way now.

I needed to learn to recognize self-defeating behaviors, what started it, and what did I get out of it.

For example, I hurt someone I love when I abused them with words.

What was the state I was in when I went off the path?

I was very angry.

What was the root cause (exact nature) that led me off the path?

My feelings were hurt and I was afraid I wasn't good enough any more.

I needed to recognize the angry behavior gave pleasure (control) and/or temporary relief from pain.

Step Seven "Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

What do you do with character defects (aka shortcomings) once you have found them?

Recognize what triggers that behavior and then try out alternative responses. In the beginning some attempts will fail, but keep repeating trying out new responses until a satisfactory response is found.

What if you have character defects you do not want to get rid of?

Keep them. Focus on the ones you want to get rid of first. After awhile your way of life will change, and at that time you may want to get rid of the ones you were holding onto. If you still want to keep them and their consequences, then accept that is who you are and move on. Remember, the whole 12 Step process is one of progress not perfection.

What role does God play in this process?

Trust God will take care of God's business, if you take care of yours. My business is to change my behavior. The "What to change" and "How to change" is my business. The results of these changes is God's business.

I was running my life from the ego point of view, now I was looking for another point of view, another direction to go. That ego point of view is not all bad, it has helped me live to this point in time. However, to be successful I needed to be willing to change. As time went on, I continued to work Step 7 and I found a better life. With that better life, I saw how the character defects I held onto were actually holding me from even a better life.

I found that I can not be all things to all people all the time. I have very real limits in terms of what I can do. I have limited resources, and I am not spiritually self-sufficient. I needed to be selfish and take care of my health. Sometimes I need outside help to do that. Sharing with a sponsor, doctor, a loving friend or family member helped me do more than I could have done on my own. Their help could be simply encouragement or offering a different perspective on how to do something.

My perspective changed to "I was the only one in my world who could do wrong." If something was wrong in my world, I began by looking to see what was my part in it.

This is a list of New Behaviors that can be used to help modify some Character Defects.

Character Defect	New Behavior
Pride	Humility
Greed	Generosity
Gluttony	Sacrifice
Lust	Self control
Anger	Patience, Tolerance and Love
Envy	Gratitude
Laziness	Action
Fear	Courage and Faith
Impatience	Patience

The following is an example of the process for the Sixth and Seventh Steps, recognize self-defeating behaviors and finding new behaviors.

I hurt someone I loved when I abused them with words.

What was the state I was in when I went off the path?

I was very angry.

What was the root cause (exact nature) that led us off the path?

My feelings were hurt and I was afraid I wasn't good enough any more.

Recognized that behavior gave pleasure and/or temporary relief.

What is another way of behaving?

Silence.

Or ... *Just say, "I would like to talk with you later."*

Or ... Say, "I don't feel so good. I want some time alone"

Step Eight "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

No man is an island. Whether I like or not, I am connected to others. I affect others and I am affected by them. I needed to acknowledge the consequences of my past behavior. This was a lesson in responsibility. I needed to begin to repair the damage of my past behavior. The required tool was honesty and my conscience was the guide. Two lists that helped.

First, write down four columns:

1. Who was harmed?
2. How were they harmed?
 - Physically (extreme case murder)
 - Emotionally (extreme case adultery)
 - Financially rob/cheat
3. What was the role of my behavior?
4. How to make amends (What needs to be fixed, if possible)?

For example: My wife's security was undermined by my adultery. I needed to acknowledge the damage I caused and be willing to work with her in finding a new relationship with her with the help of others (counselors etc.) If that was what she wanted to do.

Another list.

1. Who was I hurt by?
2. How was I hurt?
3. What do I need to do to forgive them?

For example: My best friend made fun of me in front of our friends when I slipped and fell. I felt foolish and less than. I was hurt twice, once by the fall and once by my friend's behavior. But then, I too laughed at how silly I must have looked. The hurt went away, and it was then easy to forgive.

Some hurts are hard to let go of, but as long as we keep them we will have part of us anchored in the past. To move from my old way to a new way of living required learning how to forgive and forget past hurts. I had to remember I harmed myself, and needed to make amends (fix what needs to be fixed). I also needed to find a way to forgive myself. I can't forgive myself until I learn to forgive others, and that I can't forgive others until I learn to forgive myself.

Step Nine “Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

Two parts to making amends. First is to acknowledge the harm done to the person (or institution) and second make an effort to repair the damage done. Acknowledge, pay back and repair damage. Why? To become free of the effects of past behavior. We are never completely free but we find a healthier attitude.

Think through the possible consequences. This includes asking for advice. A Sponsor can be helpful, but not always. For example, Bill may ask his brother about making amends to their Mom, or Bob may ask his sister about making amends to their Dad because in each case, they may better understand the particular context.

"I am sorry." is often not enough. "I have wronged you. I am sorry for behaving like a jerk, and I hope not to do that again." is better, but still may not be enough. We can ask the question. "How would you like me to make amends?" This may or may not be a good question to ask the person you are making amends to. However if it is asked and there were a suggested amends, it is OK to say, "Let me think about it."

The consequences of making amends needs to be examined in terms of good vs harm. Remember one of the guiding principles is **NO HARM TO ANYONE** including yourself. For example: I wouldn't tell my spouse of my adultery if they have a short fuse and a knife in their hand.

What to do about rejection of an amends? Do nothing, but be grateful that you made an honest attempt. The goal in all cases is to be free of the past without anger or resentment. The goal is not to feel good or bad, but to do what you can and what you are responsible for.

The Sponsor will be a good counselor, but the sponsee has to do what was right according to their conscience. ***It is NOT a sponsor's judgment call.*** The sponsee is beginning to become their own sponsor. ***Step 9 is not a WE thing, it is a ME thing.*** I need to recognize the harm I caused, my responsibility in it, and then take my action to fix what can be fixed. Step 9 may take a lifetime to complete.

Step Ten “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”

Step 10 is often referred to as a maintenance step. The purpose of Step 10 is to help us with our weaknesses, both old and new, as they creep up in our daily lives. It helps develop a stable, balanced mental and spiritual condition. Step 10 makes us more self-critical and less apt to criticize others. We learn how to do a spot check inventory. We take personal inventory and continue to promptly set right any new mistakes as we go along. We make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone.

A new way of living was found . We need to practice it “One Day at a Time”, but do it every day. It becomes a regular habit to look at our assets and liabilities, an inventory of strengths and weaknesses. Life is always changing and new weakness pop up. Thus there is a real need for daily inventory. When a new weakness pops up, we need to find a new way of dealing with that weakness. Otherwise we might lose the new way of living a fulfilling and satisfying life we found.

For example, a new neighbor moves next door and plays loud music when you are trying to get to sleep. It is easy to get very angry about this, but the anger is kept under control. We tried talking with the neighbor, but that didn't work. We then talked with the manager of the apartment complex, but

that didn't work. We then talked with the police, but that didn't work either. We moved, that worked. No more anger. Life happens with new experiences and we need to keep trying new ways of dealing with until we find one that works for us.

Notice, there is no judgment of others. The appropriate behavior is to do the next right thing. From AA's 12x12 "***It is a spiritual axiom that every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us.***" I choose to interpret that to mean, "I am the only one in my world that can make a mistake." The issue here is not whether or not the statement is true, but rather it is a principal to live by. When I judge something to be wrong, I look to my part in it, first. I need to understand that principal to maintain my spiritual condition.

We commenced a new way of living as we cleaned up the past. Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It can continue for our lifetime. We turn our thoughts to someone we can help with love and tolerance. Receiving strength, inspiration, and direction from God. We have begun to sense God within us. In some ways we have become partners with God.

Step Eleven "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

When I started my recovery journey, I had a temporary sponsor. He suggested to begin the day with a one word prayer, "Help", and end the day with "Thanks". He also pointed out that I did not need to believe in God to pray. Looking back now I see that "Help" reminded me that I could not do it alone, I needed something outside of me to recover. I was not God.

As time went on, I found and used the Serenity Prayer to help me stay on my recovery path. It has become one of the most powerful tools in my recovery toolbox. It has helped me realize my limitations. I can not change everything I want to. I have a hard enough time trying to change me, never mind trying to change someone else. I can share my experience with others. What they do with it, is up to them. The world changes, and my world changes. I direct my efforts to change what I can change when it is needed and appropriate. Wisdom comes with practicing the Serenity Prayer. As time goes by, it becomes clearer and clearer as to what I can not change and what I can change. I need to do the next right thing, and then let the results fall where they may. I no longer believe and act as if I am in charge of the results.

I use the Saint Francis Prayer as a reminder and inspiration to become who and how I want to be. It helps me appreciate and connect to others. More than anything else it has help me move from a ME program to a WE program. I have found a very satisfying and fulfilling life by getting out of myself and connecting with others.

I have often heard others say, "I can't meditate," and that's the end of it. It is like saying "I can't speak Russian and therefore I never will." There are many exotic and mysterious ideas about meditation that sound like a lot of hard work to achieve. To begin I suggest one of my favorite recovery tools, KISS. Keep It Simple Smartly.

What works for me is 10 to 30 minutes at a time 5 to 7 days a week in the morning. I need discipline to practice meditation repeatedly and routinely. In the beginning it was enough to let the body settle into a still position, relax the emotional feelings, and allow the mind to go where it will. Later on I found I could focus my mind by counting my breaths or repeating a word or phrase over and over again. Sometimes I use meditation music or nature sounds in the background. Most of the time the background is quiet.

Meditation may be the most subtle recovery tool. It took over 6 months for me to notice the effect of my kind of meditation. I found I was more aware of my presence and my surroundings. It was as if time slowed down and I could see and hear more clearly. There is a little story that helps me illustrate my meditation experience. There was champion long distance runner practicing for an upcoming event with reporters present. All of a sudden the runner stopped running and sat down on a nearby rock. A reporter asked the runner what he was doing? The runner said he was letting his soul catch up to him. Often I feel fragmented. Part of me is concerned about a trip I am about to take, part of me is trying to remember if I paid all my bills that were due, and so on. For me, my meditation lets my fragmented parts come together; it lets my soul catch up to me.

One of the interesting things I found was that "My mind has a mind of it's own!" Sometimes my mind wants to focus and sometimes my mind wants to jump around like a monkey in the tree tops. I no longer try to control my mind when I meditate. I simply let it be. The important thing for me to do, is to just sit still for the 10 to 30 minutes I planned for and let the mind go where it will.

Step Twelve "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

When I started this journey of recovery, I did not know where I was going, and that was scary. However, I did know where I had been and that was even scarier. I did not want to work the Steps, but I needed to work the Steps, if I wanted to change my old way of dying into a new way of living. I did not direct my change, but I was open to change. I tried to follow the instructions as well as I could, and at the same time be true to myself. I had to be honest with others and myself. I did not always agree with my sponsor, but I needed to listen to what he said and try to apply it to my life.

I became aware of a spiritual awaking when my way of living changed. It changed from a fear of dying to a desire to live. I became more and more spiritual fit and comfortable in my own skin. I felt more stable. I was standing on my own two feet, and not reacting to the outside world as much as I did when I was drinking. I knew and accepted who I was. I became my own best friend.

I have had sponsors and sponsees. They have all been teachers who I appreciate. They expanded my vision of the human condition. They have helped me see things in many new and different ways. I believe I am most helpful working with others when I am able to care about their growth and well being as humans. I try to help them find their own recovery path. I see this not as a payback program but as pass it on program.

I want to live and continue the path I am on. I have direction in life and a set of tools for living that I believe in. I have learned that I am punished not for my sins, but by my sins. If I chose to do something I know is wrong, I do not like that feeling and I do not like me. It took me a good five years to find and practice that new way of living. Since then, that new way of life has become even stronger with daily practice.

I was afraid I was going to die before I ever felt really alive. Then I started this journey of recovery. Today I feel more alive and capable of living than I ever did before. I would not be here today if I did not have the help and caring of those who I met along the way. I am very grateful for all I have received from AA while on this journey of recovery.

Final Thoughts

Hundreds of “Thank yous” to the hundreds who have helped me find a life worth living. I found and became part of GOD, Group Of Drunks, at AA meetings. I went from and ME program to a WE program. I was given the GOD, Good Orderly Direction, of 12 Steps, which was needed to go from wasting life to a life worth living. Today I feel truly blessed, and have a fulfilling, satisfying life that has love and purpose in it.

*“I am responsible.
When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help,
I want the hand of AA always to be there.
And for that I am responsible”.*

AA’s past has been successful, in particular the 12 Steps, in helping many achieve sobriety and a satisfying way of life. However, I am concerned about AA’s future. In the last 25 years, AA has not grown much. The membership of AA has been around 2 million. In the prior 25 years, AA grew from about a quarter of a million to 2 million. The graph from the General Service Office in New York is below.



Every year about 750,000 people are sent to AA by the courts, medical profession and rehabilitation centers. And about 750,000 leave AA every year. My questions “Why do so many leave?” and “Can we make AA better?” Change is a hard and scary road. If there is no change, then AA will be stuck in the past. If there is too much change, AA could become chaotic and self destructive.

I hope GSO in New York and the membership in general can find ways for AA to grow again. GSO in New York could do studies and surveys, report their finding and offer suggestions, while the general membership could become more aware as to why people leave and look for new ways to help.

We have been given two very precious gifts, a ***mind to think with*** and a ***heart to love with***. I believe they are both needed to live life successfully. However, when I drank, alcohol put my heart into cold storage (I was very selfish.) and my mind to sleep (I acted very stupid.). I was revived with AA’s help. My mind and heart need to grow, if I am going to grow in life. Problems become opportunities for the mind to grow. Questions feed this growth. The more I love and care about others, the more my heart has the ability to love. I have found that the ones who are most difficult to love are the ones that need our love the most.

My life has become a bouquet of rich and meaningful experiences. I give to you my bouquet of experiences in this monograph as an expression of gratitude for all I have received.

Thanks.