

“A NEW FREEDOM”

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Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

AA Preamble

“ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

THE only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

THERE are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

OUR primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.” AA Grapevine

“I’m John, and I’m an Alcoholic”

At the first AA meeting I attended, I introduced myself by saying “I’m John, and I’m an alcoholic.” For the next two years, I came to meetings 2-3 times per week, each time saying “I’m John, and I’m an alcoholic.” Unfortunately, during that time, I stayed sober only for short periods of time before picking up again (and again, and again). I attended meetings while drinking, and during my short stints of sobriety. At every meeting, I said “I’m an alcoholic,” but I never stayed sober very long. Each time the cycle repeated, things got worse. After two years of saying “I’m an alcoholic” at meetings – while continuing to drink – I reached the point of drinking 24/7. I couldn’t go more than two hours, day or night, without an additional drink. I realized I was circling the

drain, heading toward death, with no ability to stop myself. And it seemed that AA wasn’t helping either.

At that point, I believe my Higher Power intervened. A sudden, intense feeling came over me that I needed to detox myself, go back to AA, and take the program much more seriously than I ever had before. During the self-detox, I had a seizure, hit my head, and knocked myself unconscious. Out cold on my bathroom floor with my shoulder touching a hot radiator, I got what turned out to be a third-degree burn before my wife dragged me away from the heat. EMTs took me to the hospital. When I came awake the next morning, my vital signs were stable, and the doctors sent me home, telling me to see a burn specialist, and to avoid driving for a few days because I might have another seizure.

When I got home that day, December 13, 2009, I called a friend I had met at a 7am meeting and asked if he could give me a ride there the following morning. He picked me up; I went to the meeting with him and told a few people the whole truth about what I’d been doing. They gave me new hope, telling me I didn’t have to keep repeating that terrible cycle. I haven’t had a drink since, with the help of my Higher Power, my sponsor, and friends in the program. I call December 13 my sobriety date because it’s the day I finally accepted my alcoholism and asked for help. Just “admitting” wasn’t enough for me; I needed to reach a point of complete surrender. Recovery began for me only after I accepted, with every particle of my being, that “I’m John, and I’m an alcoholic.”

John B.

Burlington, VT

Are You Kidding?

After I was arrested on the freeway in California, heading home from a party on a boat in Newport Beach and on my way to my apartment in Venice Beach to finish the gallon of Gallo wine in my fridge, I finally called AA to see if there was a meeting close to where I lived that I could sneak into without going too far out of

my way. Oh, I knew I'd been in trouble with my drinking for a long time, but I couldn't imagine actually going public with it and calling AA. But, after I got out of jail and took a taxi home, I knew I had to do something! I was facing police charges, a job loss, and an ongoing journey into relentless self-hatred, I had to do something!

So, three days after that arrest, I went to my first meeting of AA in a church less than a mile from where I lived. I was scared, ashamed, hopeless, wrung out and completely out of energy. I just showed up at the church, depressed and nervous, and was greeted by a large man who shook my hand at the door and said, "If you think you have a drinking problem, you are at the right place." I slunk into the room of bright, cheerful people who appeared to know each other and, in a few minutes, I was swarmed by strangers who welcomed me, offered telephone numbers and cookies and told me they were glad I was there. I thought, "Leave me alone ... can't you see how horrible I feel about being here??"

Then the meeting started, and it got worse. Someone stepped up to a podium and started reading stuff. They read the 12 Steps of AA and the 12 Traditions and I thought, "What the hell does this have to do with a drinking problem?" Then a guy started talking about his experience and he talked about his drinking problem and then HE started talking about the Steps and getting a "sponsor" and praying to a higher power, and I thought, "Get me out of here, this is some sort of weird cult." The final straw that broke my camel's back was at the end of the meeting, they held hands and said the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father in heaven, blah blah blah," and I thought "Are you kidding?!?! This cannot be the answer to my drinking problem"

If you've ever had a similar experience, I am here to tell you that AA is exactly the right place for you. You can try other approaches, keep on drinking and using, go to church all your life every day, but you will never find anything that can replace the peace of mind and sense of belonging better than AA can. You will never find anything, chemical or psychological that will give you the self-respect, hope, and self-awareness that AA can. And you will never have a relationship with a power, other than you, that you can depend and rely on like you can in the tribe called Alcoholics Anonymous.

How I got from "Are you kidding" to "You have to try this to believe it" would take a lot more pages but let me be very clear... after 42 years of living with this tribe, getting a sponsor, doing the steps, praying to my very own higher power, and going to meetings, I know that AA is the answer to our life, and I'm not kidding.

One Piece of Uncut Fruit

Even in recovery we make mistakes and have continued opportunity for growth. Well into my sobriety, I made one of the more common mistakes of believing I didn't need to go to AA meetings anymore. I felt secure in my sobriety and that I could focus on other things. That did not end well. Nothing happened immediately, and I never did pick up again, however, my character defects were now allowed to go unchecked and after a period of time, I started thinking much the same way I thought for all my active years. My natural instincts once again became misdirected. I convinced myself that I was justified, because I had earned it, to steal money from my employer. Since this continued on over three plus years and totaled a substantial amount of money, I ultimately ended up getting caught and was sentenced to 27 months in Federal Prison. The good news was that once I got caught the first thing I did was return to AA and began working the program in earnest. It was 18 months before I had to serve which gave me a good amount of time to work through the steps and develop a solid recovery program. Then came my prison time.

My life in Prison was an extraordinary experience. Although I was sentenced to a minimum security prison camp, I had a pacemaker put in me a month before my sentencing. So when I reported to the prison camp I thought I was assigned to, I found out that I was really going to the large federal prison medical facility next door. It was a high security prison that also happened to have a hospital and mental health facility as part of it. Because there are only five of these in the country, they are set-up to handle all levels of prisons from high risk individuals sentenced to maximum security all the way down to the white collar felons such as me. There were 1200 inmates and for a middle class white guy like myself, it was a scary place. However, I adapted and thrived by becoming active in helping others, working in recovery groups, teaching financial courses, working in the kitchen and leading by example. It was an overall amazing experience. I could write pages and pages to recount all the stories and experiences. I would like to focus on one that has proven to be my guiding mantra in life.

In my first month in prison I noticed a guy that looked about my age, seemed to keep to himself, and I noticed he read the NY Times every day. His name was Murray. He was not engaged in all of the drama and underground life that existed in the prison. I connected with him right away. Turns out Murray was in the last few months of a ten-year sentence for being a fairly

large pot dealer that he covered up with a few legitimate business operations. A bright guy that was misguided by the attraction to the profits of an illegal pot business. Murray was ready to return to society and lead a life of integrity. We spent many hours walking the track in the rec area talking about why we did what we did and what we were going to do about it moving forward. Murray gave me a lot of good advice about how to survive in Prison, advice I used for the next couple of years.

One evening Murray and I were eating dinner in the chow hall. We were sitting at one of the many tables of four. There were two other inmates at the table. One of them offered me a piece of his fruit saying he did not want it. I accepted it. Up to now there was nothing wrong with this. However, I wanted to take it back to my cell to have later along with the piece of fruit I had received with my dinner. This all seemed fairly harmless and I had seen many inmates at this point who had walked out of the chow hall with a couple extra pieces of fruit. However, there was a rule that was clearly defined in our inmate handbook. It stated that inmates could not remove food from the chow hall except for "One Piece of Uncut Fruit". So I picked up my two pieces of fruit, placed them in my back pockets and headed for the door. Murray then said to me, what are you doing? I had no idea what he was talking about and asked him. He asked me, why are you here? Meaning why was I in prison. It took me a couple times of asking him what he meant. He finally said, you are here for embezzlement and you have told me many times that you don't live like that anymore and you have taken the proper steps to ensure that this will never happen again. And here you are, stealing an extra piece of fruit like it is no big deal.

Wow, did this hit me and hit me hard. He was right, I was easily justifying to myself, without even blinking, that since everyone else took fruit and the guards didn't really seem to care, then it was ok to do. But really wasn't that how I got to where I was. I justified my actions leading myself to believing that what I was doing was ok. If I want to really lead a life of integrity and act as honestly as I think I am, then I need to do this on all levels. Therefore, today I always try to keep this story on the top of mind and thus the mantra "One Piece of Uncut Fruit" at the forefront of my behaviors and actions.

Mickey W.

My name is Tammy and I am an alcoholic.

I grew up in a small town in Vermont. My family had many alcoholics. As I heard said before, "if you shook my family tree, you'd have drunks all over the lawn." At a very young age I made the connection that drugs and alcohol were the

problem with my family and I made a vow to never, ever drink or take drugs.

When I was 11 years old, I sampled many of my mother's bottles of alcohol one day and I got drunk. When the feeling of alcohol went through my body, I had the most amazing feeling. It was magical to me and I remember thinking that there was something not right with my family, but this couldn't possibly be it. I was hooked at that moment!

I loved the effect alcohol and drugs had on me. I began to drink regularly at the age of 13. My consumption and tolerance increased. Alcohol quickly became a priority in my life. Whenever I drank, I would get drunk. I would take anything and everything to get a buzz. Oblivion was the end result.

I gave up control each time I began to drink. Blackouts, car accidents, trouble with the law, and impulsive actions became routine. My introduction to AA came after an overdose that almost took my life.

I had been told many times that I needed help, but until I hit my bottom, I wasn't motivated to change.

Beginning recovery in the AA program was difficult for me. I couldn't imagine not drinking for the rest of my life. I was told to change people, places and things in my life or I would drink again. I felt a great deal of resistance to the AA program. I wanted to be able to hang out with my old friends, go to the places I always went, and not be told what I had to do to be sober. I didn't trust people in AA. I had periods of relapse as a result of not listening to suggestions on how to stay sober

I finally came to a point when I surrendered and decided I would do anything suggested to stay sober. I think it was hard for me because I honestly didn't know who I was without drugs and alcohol. I finally got to the place where I knew and accepted the fact that if I continued to drink, I would die. That is when I finally became willing to sincerely try the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I have now been sober in AA for many years. I attend meetings on a regular basis, have a home group, a sponsor, and do service work to help other alcoholics. I am really involved in AA, I am happy and have no desire to drink. I love my life and I love Alcoholics Anonymous. I am truly grateful to be clean and sober.

AA Quote of the Month

“The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink.” Alcoholics Anonymous p. 24

New to AA?

Only you can decide

If you seem to be having trouble with your drinking, or if your drinking has reached the point where it worries you a bit, you may be interested in knowing something about Alcoholics Anonymous and the A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism. After reading this, you may decide that A.A. has nothing to offer you. Should this be the case, we suggest only that you keep an open mind on the subject. Consider your drinking carefully in the light of what you may learn from these pages. Determine, for yourself, whether or not alcohol has truly become a problem for you. And remember that you will always be most welcome to join the thousands of men and women in A.A. who have put their drinking problems behind them and now lead “normal” lives of constructive, day-by-day sobriety.

[Do you think you have a problem with alcohol?](#) Do you want to stop drinking, but find you cannot quit entirely or you have little control over the amount you drink? If you answered yes to either of these questions, there are a number of ways Alcoholics Anonymous can help. For confidential support, please contact us.

Call the 24-hour help line closest to you now

- (802) 447-1285 – Bennington – **District 7**
- (802) 257-5801 – Brattleboro – **District 8**
- (802) 864-1212 – Burlington – **District 2&11**
- (802) 388-9284 – Middlebury – **District 9**
- (802) 229-5100 – Montpelier & Morrisville – **District 4**
- (802) 775-0402 – Rutland – **District 6**
- (802) 281-3340 – St. Albans – **District 1**
- (802) 334-1213 – St. Johnsbury & NEK – **District 3**
- (802) 885-8281 – Springfield – **District 10**
- (802) 295-7611 – White River Junction – **District 5**

For meeting information in Vermont, go to aavt.org