

"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

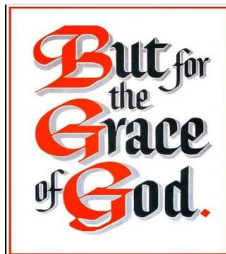
"ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

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 had probably only been sober a week when one of my first real connections with some kind of power greater than myself happened. I was in rehab then, and they used to pile a bunch of us into a van and take us to AA meetings out in "the world." This particular evening they drove us to a big double-speaker meeting. There must have been a hundred people there, maybe more. We went inside, probably with that same wide-eyed, kind of dazed look I've seen on the faces of many newcomers since. All around us were people talking, laughing

together, enjoying themselves. They actually seemed.....happy! Happy to be in an AA meeting, no less!

Then the meeting started. I couldn't tell you anything those speakers said. I think one was a man and one was a woman, but I couldn't tell you how long they'd been sober, or even whether their stories had much in common with mine. But I do remember that the first speaker told their story, and it was the funniest story I'd heard in a long time. That person spoke and the whole room was laughing from start to finish. And.....I was laughing with them! There we all were, laughing about the misery they'd experienced while drinking and drugging, all the trouble they'd brought down on themselves, and, stranger still, laughing about sobriety! How could there be anything to laugh about it in a boring life without drugs and alcohol?

Then the second speaker went to the podium. And they were even funnier! I laughed like I hadn't laughed in years, literally. I couldn't remember the last time I'd laughed like that. For a long, long time there hadn't been squat to laugh about in my life. I'd come to that rehab fresh out of a one-room apartment with a ceiling that was falling down from water leaks, a dirty futon, a pile of dirty clothes, and another pile of empties. There were a few bongos and pipes lying around, a mirror and a razor blade for doing lines, and not much else. Well, I did have the eviction notice the sheriff had posted on my door, I remember that. No one ever came over, not that I really wanted anyone to, and pretty much the only people I ever saw socially were the ones I knew from the bar. So no, there hadn't been much to laugh about in those last couple of years.

And now here I was, in rehab, my life coming apart at the seams, at an AA meeting no less, and.....laughing! As in, laughing like I might pee my pants laughing. And I remember thinking, "what in the hell is going on?" The second speaker finished, everyone clapped, and the meeting wrapped up. And there it was again, all these people milling around afterward, talking to each other, happy, still laughing, having fun. I still remember the strange feeling that came over me. I couldn't figure it out. It was just weird. I know now, looking back on it,

that I was feeling, well, happy. A little bit like all those other people in the room that night. I felt happy, at least a little, for the first time in I don't know how long, and probably more important, I think I felt a little glimmer of hope.

I know now, looking back on it, that that's what I was feeling. But at the time all I felt was really, really weird. The next day, back at rehab, I had a session with my counselor, and I told him how weird I felt. He just looked at me for a minute, then said, "you think it's weird now, just wait a few months!" And he was right. Because, like I said, what I was really feeling, even if I couldn't have explained it, was happy and hopeful. Not too much, just a little, but as time went by and I stayed sober, there was more and more of that. And happy and hopeful was a weird feeling, so yes, it just got weirder and weirder.

I remember thinking that I'd come to AA because my life was a wreck and I just wanted to stop drinking. That was all. Now there was this other stuff happening. I remember thinking that was NOT what I'd signed up for. But my experience has been that it actually was what I signed up for. I just didn't know it then. That night a power greater than myself had shown me what I was getting into, and it was weird, and yeah, it just got weirder, because I started to feel real hope and happiness for the first time in forever. Because sobriety is worth it. And sobriety is fun! Even when it's hard, which it has been plenty of times, it's still worth it. Sometimes it is hard, but in those times I always have hope. And, believe it or not, most of the time it's fun. Fun? Without alcohol and drugs? I sure didn't see that coming! But it has been. And it's always been worth it.

Anonymous

Off The Wall Group, Burlington, VT

From Daily Reflections, p. 192:

THE HEART OF TRUE SOBRIETY

We find that no one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. Willingness, honesty and open-mindedness are the essentials of recovery. But these are indispensable.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, p. 568

Am I honest enough to accept myself as I am and let this be the "me" that I let others see? Do I have the willingness to go to any length, to do whatever is necessary to stay sober? Do I have the open-mindedness to hear what I have to hear, to think what I have to think, and to feel what I have to feel?

If my answer to these questions is "Yes," I know enough about the spirituality of the program to stay sober. As I continue to work the Twelve Steps, I move on to the heart of true sobriety: serenity with myself, with others, and with God as I understand Him.



Michelle's Story

It was clear to me during childhood, and especially in my teenage years, that my parents thought I had an attitude problem. "Stop rolling your eyes at me." "You'd better change your attitude quick, young lady." "Nobody likes a smart-a\$\$, Michelle." (I've found that to be completely wrong. A **lot** of people like a smart-a\$\$.) I never thought of myself that way. I thought I was feisty, confident, strong, and smart. I was all those things, and I still am.

None of those characteristics prevented me from becoming an alcoholic, though. I started drinking at age 15, at church camp, of course. I got drunk, and not just a little drunk, but crawl across the campus in the middle of the night kind of drunk, because I absolutely could not stand up. My last drink, at 38, was a sip of some terrible, dark, German beer that was supposed to be great. In between those years I tried to control my drinking, made rules around it, broke those rules, and made more. I just didn't want to be an alcoholic, and I was going to deny it at all costs. Well, almost all costs. I couldn't justify drinking and driving with my kids in the car. I could never quite get okay with that. I knew if I drank, I'd drive. I desperately wanted to not drink and drive, and I couldn't stop drinking.

When I was ready to quit, I went to an AA meeting just to prove I didn't belong there. Where I thought I belonged was in an expensive, private therapist's office, not with a bunch of drunks. It turns out, I belonged in both places. AA helped me with my

drinking and thinking. Therapy helped me with my mental health.

But that's kind of how my sobriety goes, much like my childhood. Maybe I have an attitude, maybe I don't always want to do the work of AA. As a matter of fact, none of my sponsors have ever given me a suggestion I wanted to hear at the time it was given. I hated all the suggestions. Every one. Fortunately, AA didn't require me to have a good attitude before I could get sober. It didn't require me to want to hear what was being said to me. It didn't require me to believe any of the steps would work. It required none of that and thank god!!

AA required I be willing. Willing to show up at a meeting, willing to call someone before I drank, willing to get and use a sponsor, willing to take suggestions even when I didn't want to, willing to take the next right action, willing to be honest with myself and my sponsor. I just had to be willing. And when I wasn't willing, I could pray for willingness. At the beginning of every day, I prayed, "Lord (insert your own name for your higher power here), please give me the willingness to be willing to do your will. Amen." That was it. Every morning I said that prayer. When my sponsor would give me a suggestion, I would usually say something along the lines of "I think that's a dumb idea, but I'll do it anyway." And my sponsor was fine with that. I had the willingness to take the suggestion. I've stayed sober for more than eight years, and I no longer feel the need to tell my sponsor I think the idea is dumb. I just thank her for her help and take the next right action. (Sometimes I still think the idea is dumb, but I don't have to say it anymore. I can act better than I feel.)

When my first sponsor died, on the day of her funeral, her sponsor's sponsor told me about a conversation they had about me the first night we met. They both agreed that my sponsor was going to have her hands full with me, my anger, and my attitude. But they both loved me through it all, supported and didn't judge, spoke honestly and didn't give up. AA works if you have the willingness to do the work, even if you don't like it or don't believe it will work. That's not required. And again, thank god!



I've been asked to assemble some sort of directions to walk through the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous alone. Personally, I don't believe it can be done. Why is that? If we read the BB and other Spiritual literature we are never alone. We never have been and never will be. "For deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God." (p. 55)

So, with that being said, I propose to you that if you do believe in a power greater than yourself you can work these steps for the most part without another human in your cell. After all, God is right there with you at all times. If you do have a Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, open it and start the process by reading it. Read every page asking yourself as you read, "Am I a real alcoholic?" as defined so clearly on page 21. "Am I trying to run my life on a level of self-centeredness that only destroys any chance of a relationship with anyone?" "Do I believe that God is and I'm not Him?" (pgs. 43-59)

I spent my entire life believing in God as I understood Him. He was the creator of all. What I failed to truly understand was if I turned my entire life over to Him, my fears would fall from me. (pg. 68) Life could have new meaning when I stand in His light. Relieve me of me so I may better do His will. (pgs. 60-63) My relationships with others would need to be the highlights of my life.

This meant I needed to take this personal inventory, truly look and see my defects of character, and then discuss them with another so I could see my life from an entirely different angle. (pgs. 64-76) During these isolated times I must rely on God until I can discuss my flaws and damages done with another human being. (pgs. 77-84) Being willing when unable to make direct contact with others is staying in the light. The freedom from self is the path to this power.

My spiritual life has taken me to an understanding that life is not about me. Yes I must be a responsible citizen in all my affairs. What does that mean? I ask myself. Treating every single soul I come in contact with love and respect. My story

illuminated many areas where I show up and have shown up an unloving and bitter man, driven by fear, resentment, self-pity; disguised as someone I'm not. These behaviors are human dysfunction. The power of Step 10's explicit directions (p. 84 & 85) allows me to watch for these behaviors and defects, only to promise me incredible freedoms (p. 85)

As a result of these first 85 pages, my level of God-consciousness has become a working part of my entire being. This "vital sixth sense" (p. 85) is promised, if I follow a few directions.

My Spiritual life sky rocketed beyond my imagination when I began to feel connected to This God of My Understanding. Step 11 (pgs. 85-88) has become a direct link in my connections to God; sitting quietly, following the directions in Prayer (asking) and Meditation (listening). My continued experience with Step 11 has walked me through some of the hardest times in my life. I firmly believe the commitment to Step 11 can and will carry me through the toughest of times and the best of times. I am actually sitting in meditation as I write this letter to you who mean so much to me. God has directed – I've done the typing.

This has now led me to Step 12 (pgs. 89-103), the black and white directions of how to "carry the message." What message you may ask? It is the message freely given to you today; how to help another alcoholic after "...having had a Spiritual Awakening as the Result of these Steps." You can help when no one else can. Believe in you! God does!

My life has changed in so many ways through this process called life. Once, my soul felt empty. As a result of Asking God for guidance my life has been reborn. The promises throughout our book have and continue to be given to me.

Beyond my wildest dreams!

IT WORKS-IT REALLY DOES!

God Is,

Bill S. - aka B.B.B.

I got sober pretty young and launched right into the steps immediately with the guidance of long-term recovering people. I completed my first fourth and fifth step and was under the impression that it was one and done. So I continued on the steps and believed I was done with 4 & 5 forever.

Fast forward a couple of years... I had gone through all the steps, was sponsoring women, had a deepening faith and was content especially since I was moving into my first apartment (all by myself. I got all my stuff there but was horrified at how filthy it was. So I started cleaning. I had scrubbed the kitchen floor and thought it looked good enough and was pretty happy with my work. But there was this one spot that was still dirty so I scrubbed even harder. When I stood up and looked back at my work I realized that the area I had just scrubbed clean for the second time was cleaner than the rest of the floor. Oh my...what I thought was clean originally wasn't. So I doubled my efforts and re-scrubbed the whole floor. During that process I realized that the fourth and fifth steps were like that too—I had to do it over and over to clean up my past, get right with my present and live better for my future. In fact ALL the steps needed to be done continuously until I lived them. Progress not perfection was my goal.

Today, that kitchen floor analogy continues to be an inspiration for continuing to work all the steps of the program. Because I'm never going to be done, just improve on my prior work with the help of AA, my sponsor and Higher Power. What a blessing.

Heidi D.

St. Cloud, FL



AA QUOTES OF THE MONTH

“There is a solution. Almost none of us liked the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process requires for its successful consummation. But we saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it. When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, there was nothing left for us to do but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet. We have found much of heaven and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed.”

p. 25, Alcoholics Anonymous

Tradition Five

“Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”

“Just as firmly bound by obligation are the members of Alcoholics Anonymous, who have demonstrated that they can help problem drinkers as others seldom can. The unique ability of each A.A. to identify himself with, and bring recovery to, the newcomer in no way depends upon his learning, eloquence, or on any special individual skills. The only thing that matters is that he is an alcoholic who has found a key to sobriety. These legacies of suffering and of recovery are easily passed among alcoholics, one to the other. This is our gift from God, and its bestowal upon others like us is the one aim that today animates A.A.'s all around the globe.”

p. 150-151, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

Acceptance

“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.” Alcoholics Anonymous p. 417, 4th edition

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