

Emotional Sobriety

A Workshop

As the Big Book so clearly states, if we want the AA/Al-Anon way of life, we must become willing to go to any lengths to get it--and be ready to take certain steps. To stop ourselves from drinking and stinking thinking, we recognize these are symptoms. We must get to the underlying causes of our physical addiction and mental obsessions. Most of us discover that a major cause of our living problems stem from emotional immaturity. We seem to be people who have no defenses against the onslaughts of misguided feelings. We tend to go to extremes, in coping with emotional pain and discomfort, usually through some kind of attempted escape. We become aware after coming to the program that the intoxicants we need to be aware of are not alcohol and drugs but the emotional intoxicants--anger, self-pity, intolerance, resentment, jealousy, dishonesty, self-deception, criticism, fear, depression, and blame.

To achieve emotional sobriety, we need a couple of attributes: willingness to change and a Power greater than ourselves that will provide the strength we need to change. We must recognize that progress is an unending

journey and perfection an unreachable goal. And while we have a long way to go, we must make the journey. To stand still is to stagnate.

The following are some quotations that set the mood as we begin our journey to emotional sobriety:

"I can be myself when I am in a situation I like. Can I be myself when I am in a situation I don't like." from an Anonymous Alcoholic.

"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path." p. 58 **Alcoholic Anonymous**.

"The solutions rest with me.....People can affect me only as I allow them to, I need not be influenced by others, for I am free to consult my own wishes and standards.....With the help of my Higher Power, I can adorn my life with comfort, serenity, and enjoyment. It does not depend on any other person, and the sooner I accept this fact the sooner I will be able to face myself realistically." - p. 228 - **One Day At A Time**

If we desire to stop, or at least diminish, emotional slips and binges brought to the surface and aggravated by the problem of alcoholism, then we are ready to say to ourselves, "Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care

with complete abandon." - p.59 - Alcoholics Anonymous

“When a drunk has a terrific hangover because he drank heavily yesterday, he cannot live well today. But there is another kind of hangover which we all experience whether we are drinking or not: That is the emotional hangover, the direct result of yesterday’s and sometimes today’s excesses of negative emotion -- anger, fear, jealousy, and the like. It requires an admission and correction of errors *now*.” **12 Steps and 12 Traditions, Step 10.**

“It is a spiritual axiom that every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong *with us*.” **12 Steps and 12 Traditions, Step 10.**

Finding ourselves locked into the intoxicating grip of certain emotions and suffering the pain and mental hangover from these, we found it necessary to learn which ones are poisonous and threatening to our emotional sobriety and serenity. We learn that we can avoid these emotions and their crippling effects if we can act our way into right thinking. We do this by saying to ourselves, "If I were not....(jealous, depressed, etc.) what would I be thinking, feeling, doing?" We step out on faith after asking God's guidance. And we try to remember: EASY DOES IT, but DO IT!

The following list is by no means a complete register of emotional mischief-makers: however, our recognition and treatment of these will certainly provide the strength, hope, and experience to overcome any others.....one day at a time, sometimes one moment at a time.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS:

Emotion: A strong surge of feeling marked by an impulse to outward expression and often accompanied by complex bodily reactions.

Intoxicate: To make drunk, to elate or excite....medical term – to poison

Sober: Not drunk, temperate; moderate; quite; calm; sensible; free from exaggeration and distortion.

ANGER:

A deadly poison to sanity and serenity. A special "punch" to those who want to be "God" in their own lives. Its impact succeeds in obliterating reason and self-control. One can "enjoy" being a human hurricane while plunged into the depths of this emotional intoxicant. Sometimes the debris left after this storm is staggering.

SOLUTION:

If just one whiff of anger sets up the compulsion to act on it, practice total abstinence. **“Restraint of pen and tongue” pg. 91 in the 12 & 12. “If we were to live, we had to be free of anger.” pg. 66 in the Big Book.** That does not mean we stuff anger – it means we step 10 anger which is really 4 through 9. Remember **“Love and Tolerance is our code.” Step 10 Big Book of Alcoholic Anonymous.** Should the compulsion get the upper hand, 3rd and 5th step it when sanity has returned. Strength to resist taking the first "drink" of anger comes from daily use of the 12 steps, slogans, and willingness to assume responsibility for one's own conduct.

INTOLERANCE:

An emotional inebriate which fouls up 12th step work. It succeeds in blocking awareness of what has

been shared with one in the program. It causes emotional biases and prejudices. **“A spirit of intolerance might repel alcoholics whose lives could have been saved, had it not been for such stupidity.” Pg. 103 in the Big Book.**

SOLUTION:

Daily doses of LIVE AND LET LIVE plus AN OPEN MIND. Seek to develop compassion...the highest form of emotional maturity. **Begin with steps 6 and 7, step 10 –LOVE AND TOLERANCE IS OUR CODE (Pg. 84 Big book). The prayer of St. Francis (pg. 99 step 11 in the 12 & 12).** We can also begin with self-compassion, that is ...BE GOOD TO YOURSELF. Self-compassion means realizing the meaning, quality, and intensity of one's own emotions. Being careful not to use Step 10 to beat yourself up. Step 11 in the Big Book says **“We must be careful not to drift into remorse and morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others – pg. 86).** The emotional identification of self enables you to "feel with" others. Learn to distinguish between a person and his behavior and detach from the problem but not the person.

SELF-PITY:

One sip of this fairly slow-acting emotional intoxicant can lead to distorted perspective. Giant mountains mushroom out of little, tiny molehills. Problems are magnified, and calamities loom on all sides. The drunkenness progresses to the crying stage, and the dialogue runs, "Nobody loves me (sob, sob) nobody appreciates me (sob, sob) nobody cares (sob, sob) nobody recognizes how hard I try (sob, sob) everybody is against me (sob, sob) I can't do anything right (sob, sob) I might as well be dead (sob, sob)." Set to a mournful tune, these lines are played over and over in a half-dark, gloomy, and un-swept mental hang out. At the center of self-pity is a half-grown kid having a slobbering, blubbering temper fit at God, self, circumstances, and people. As long as he can keep the drunken tears flowing, he does not have to leave and go out into the light. **“Self –pity is one of the most unhappy and consuming defects that we know. It is a bar to all spiritual progress and can cut off all effective communication with our fellows because of its inordinate demands for attention and sympathy. It is a maudlin form of martyrdom, which we can ill afford (pg. 238 in As Bill Sees It). Poor me, poor me pour me another drink.”**

SOLUTION:

Step 6 & 7 , 11th Step Prayer in the Big Book on pg. 86 “We ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives.” “Avoid then, the deliberate manufacture of misery, but if trouble comes, cheerfully capitalize it as an opportunity to demonstrate His omnipotence.”(pg. 133 Big Book). Hourly doses of daily gratitude, appreciation, and admission of God's Grace. Stop hanging out in mental dumps: stop keeping company with the bad companions of resentment, fear, and selfishness. Don't flirt with self-justification and self-righteousness which will sweet-talk you into a dive. Total abstinence is hardly possible unless the self-pity trips are replaced with being “others-centered (step 12). “ Substitute daily contacts with a Higher Power and group members for the frequent visits to the self-pity bars.

RESENTMENT:

An emotional intoxicant distilled from character defects. Guaranteed to impede progress in Steps 3 and 11. Drinking of resentment poisons spiritual progress. Often leads to emotional enslavement to the hated people and things. An effective way to stay drunk on resentment is to bar-hop from anger to self-pity to

intolerance to jealousy to fear then home to an unbelievable hangover and depression.

“Resentment is the “number one “ offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When this malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically (pg. 64 Big Book).” “ Harboring resentment is infinitely grave. For then we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the spirit (pg. 3 As Bill Sees It). “ It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness...But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave (pg. 66 Big Book)”.

SOLUTION:

The 4th step prayer **“We ask God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.”** Practice steps 4 & 5. Be sure to put it down on paper, and the fourth column (looking at our part) is a must. Steps 10, 11, and

12. Helping others can get us out of ourselves long enough for God to get in to remove the resentment.

JEALOUSY:

“Keep it always in sight that we are dealing with that most terrible human emotion: *jealousy*. (pg. 82 Big Book).”The greatest enemies of us alcoholics are **resentment, *jealousy*, envy, frustration and fear (pg 145 Big Book).**” Jealousy is a powerful concoction of resentment, fear, self-pity, low self-esteem, and insecurity. Drinking freely and often from jealousy allows one to lose self-control. The mental blend diminishes peace of mind, dangerously threatens faith and trust in self and others. Jealousy brought into the program hurts the group unity and fellowship.

SOLUTION:

Recovery is possible through daily attention to spiritual needs. Humility daily injected disperses the residual effects of jealousy.

DEFINITIONS OF HUMILITY

1. Humility is a word often misunderstood. To those who have made progress in AA, it amounts to a clear recognition of what and who we are, followed by a sincere attempt to become

what we could be. (pg 58, step 5, in the 12 & 12)

2. No thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less.
3. Being teachable.

A Step 4 and a Step 5 reveals the "exact nature" of one's compulsion to this green-eyed monster. Steps 6 and 7 also route this insidious mind-binder. Write it down, talk about it one to one, not at the meeting level...remember to carry the message to the meeting (tradition 5) and the mess to your sponsor, or whoever has what you want, get out of yourself and help someone else. Doing any kind of estimable acts builds self-esteem

DISHONESTY and SELF-DECEPTION:

Emotional intoxicants which, like champagne, seem harmless are subtly laced with rationalization and equivocation. Indulgence in this pair of defects can cause one to cross over into crippling self-deceit with the greatest of ease. Their side effects make us feel sure we are not the maker of our own mischief. We cannot understand why our fringe benefits from the program are not coming to us as we see them coming to others. We cannot give up our secret flirtation with this pair of faults until we are brought painfully to a bottom, facing yet another surrender..

SOLUTION:

Recuperation from the DTs of dishonesty and self-deception requires accepting responsibility for these faults. We must stop manipulating ourselves and others. We must treat this spiritual malady with rigorous honesty, a noticeable change brought about by a meticulous application of the 12 Steps to our lives.. The Big Book refers to the importance of honesty throughout the book. However, steps 4 & 5 bring the honesty home if we are willing to address the fourth column.

CRITICISM:

A social cocktail made with equal parts of rumor, gossip, and secret glee over another's misfortune. It feels soooooo good to smugly say, "poor thing". The accompanying hors d'oeuvre of self-righteousness is too good to resist. Such behavior hurts and humiliates others and can, especially in the case of newcomers, drive them away. They have come to Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon in good faith and can be driven away believing that these programs are not so special after all.

SOLUTION:

We need to read the directions on our own prescription. Doesn't it say we should pay attention to our own needs for recovery? The ODAAT says, on page 92, "The contented, well-adjusted person has no need to look for flaws in others." Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon are fellowships of equals; neither brains, nor money, nor looks, nor prestige, nor education, nor cleverness, nor the lack of these kept alcoholism and its effects away from us. Daily cultivate love that looks for nothing in return and meditate on our own good fortune to enjoy the free gift of God's grace. Always remember there is no such thing as constructive criticism.

FEAR:

Nothing is more self-centered than "fear." **"This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it."** **"Sometimes we think fear ought to be classed with stealing. It seems to cause more trouble."** (pg. 67 & 68 Big Book). We are not talking about healthy fear; we are talking about unhealthy fear. There is a difference.

It is healthy to be afraid of taking a drink or crossing the street on a red light. Unhealthy fear is being afraid to look for a job or go back to school, go out town or just talk to people. A lot of people have phobias which debilitate them and spiritual progress is paralyzed and the demons move into our psyche where they live rent-free until driven out.

SOLUTION:

Walking through fear is exercising Faith! Nowhere in the first 164 pages in the Big Book does it say you can not have fear and faith at the same time. What it says is “The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All men of faith have courage.” (pg. 68 Big Book fear inventory). You don’t need courage unless you are afraid. Practice courage by walking through fear after doing steps 4 & 5. The fear prayer on pg. 68 in the Big Book says **“We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be.”** Then it says **“At once, we commence to outgrow fear.”** It does not say we at once outgrow fear. Step 6 & 7 address fear. We discover that when we start walking through fear we are making amends to ourselves and those we have hurt because of our fear. Continue to watch for fear in step 10 & 11 and make corrective measures when necessary. The Big Book says on pg. 86 & 84 **“After making our review we ask God’s forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures**

should be taken.” “This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime.” As fear drains away, it is replaced with faith -- the inner knowledge that God is in charge, therefore, all is well. Fear can erode our faith if we are slack about our commitment and we must remember on page 155 of ODAAT, it says, “We realize peace of mind does not depend on conditions outside us, but those inside us.”.

BLAME:

A sour emotional beverage. With blame all inhibitions and self-defects are freed and vented on all those faltering, imperfect creatures out there. A few swigs of blame allows one to go to the core of his magnificent nature and expose the blundering of those who are stumbling blocks in his path to well-earned, overdue, and deserved glory. As long as a person can “hold” his blame, he feels not need to sober up and take a look at himself. When the intoxication from blame begins to wear off, one can keep the buzz going by mixing his drinks, usually shots of criticism, intolerance, resentment and dishonesty. . A need to assign blame is an attempt to evade our part in the adventures of life that go wrong. With blame, our defects are assigned to others -- those poor creatures who, although they may mean well, just can’t seem to get it together. If I can convince myself that my troubles are of your making, I am lured into believing that you are to blame for my

misfortunes. The other side of that coin is that if my problems really are your fault, I am in real trouble. In order for me to grow and recover, I have to get you to change. The Big Book on pg. 62 says **“So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making.”**

SOLUTION:

A relentless inventory process must go on in our lives. Through this process, if we are honest, we will not lose sight of the part we play in our problems. By accepting responsibility for ourselves, we are no longer at the mercy of any ill wind that blows. Total abstinence from blame brings miracles of tolerance, grace -- rich spiritual rewards reflected in a life of real fulfillment. On page 347 of ODAAT can be found the statement, “Most of that which happens to me, good or bad, is self-created”

DEPRESSION:

A fearsome emotional downer. Depression plunges one into an abyss of remorse, regret, and rejection. We float around in an internal hell unable to sense balance or touch solid ground. Our emotional vision is blurred. We cannot see the helping outstretched hand. Our emotional hearing is dulled. We cannot hear words of encouragement and strength. Our emotional touch is deadened and we cannot feel love. Our emotional taste

is that of isolation and melancholy. Our emotional smell is weakened and we are unable to perceive the essence of harmony and fellowship. The whole being is so drugged by depression that realistic contact with self and others is suspended.

SOLUTION:

Huge daily doses of an attitude of gratitude, practicing the steps and working with others. We need a willingness to surrender this unique pain. Sobriety follows quickly when one can be grateful for pain rather than struggling with it. Thanking God for pain relapses it back into His care. We are saying that we realize we are not perfect enough to manage all of our affairs, and that we recognize also that His principles provide us with protection and guidance. Gratitude brings release; Release brings experience, experience brings hope, hope brings faith; faith brings freedom from fear. The Big Book on pg. 8 says **“I was to know happiness, peace and usefulness in a way of life that is incredibly more wonderful as passes.”** **“A body badly burned by alcohol does not often recover overnight nor do twisted thinking and depression vanish in a twinkling. We are convinced that a spiritual mode of living is a most powerful health restorative.”** A spiritual awakening takes place, a rebirth occurs, and one is never the same again.

Emotional sobriety enables us to carry heavy emotional burdens with relative ease. The more gentle the environment, the less need we feel for self-protection. The more threatening the environment to our feelings of well-being, the greater is our timidity and need for self-protection. Our altered perception of reality due to our exposure to the disease of alcoholism can be a tremendous obstacle to emotional growth. Our protective fences became walls of isolation, cutting off experience with people and things. Most of us were convinced we had not succeeded in winning at the excessive competitiveness found in the affairs of our lives. If we felt we had succeeded, then we were really confused at why we could not beat alcohol. Either way we could not get emotionally comfortable. Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon offered a way out of this dilemma. One given to emotional slips has no way of knowing when the compulsion may assert itself. Emotional sobriety isn't a sometime thing. We can recognize that emotional binges are often involuntary but always forgivable. We begin to recover from emotional vulnerability when we understand and accept emotions instead of fighting them -- when we find constructive ways to express feelings and when we keep our sense of humor. (If you don't have one, get one.) Emotional sobriety comes when we accentuate positive emotions.