



by: Herb K

OUR WAY OF LIFE

AA was originally designed to produce freedom, both from our alcohol addiction and from our spiritual malady, through a spiritual awakening. Then we are invited to model that freedom for others through a personal outreach structure. How effective are you/we today?

Based on my 34 years of experience, there are many wonderful and helpful components to support the initial approach to recovery in any 12 Step Program:

- Attending and participating in a variety of Twelve Step meetings;
- Taking and performing commitments at those meetings;
- Having and regularly attending a home group;
- Getting and fostering an effective relationship with an experienced sponsor;
- Obtaining and reading the literature, especially the books Alcoholics Anonymous and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions;
- Knowing and understanding the Twelve Steps.

But these, singularly or cumulatively, are NOT the antidote to "unmanageability" – the spiritual malady. The "Big Book" Alcoholics Anonymous suggests that living "Our Way of Life", is the formula for the "daily reprieve", the application of Steps 10, 11, & 12, DAILY.

Thinking that one can sustain the Step Twelve promise of a Spiritual Awakening by reading the Twelve Step literature, sitting in meetings, and discussing it with our sponsor, is like sitting in our garage, reading the auto manual with our mechanic, and expecting the car to stay fixed.

My understanding of the AA "program of recovery", which addresses our addiction(s), is a series of suggested personal actions described precisely in the Big Book:

1. We establish a relationship with:

Power: Steps 1-3 = our experience of "no choice"; then our choice about and for Power;

Self: Steps 4-7 = our identification & removal of the obstacles in us to Power;

Others: Steps 8-9 = our willingness to change & to repair the damage we caused others.

It is a process based on a sequence of rigorous actions...

Prayer • Reading • Reflection • Writing • Discussion

... leading to the experience of the promised Spiritual Awakening. We are changed!

2. We foster and maintain these relationships through a consistent daily practice of:

Step 10: Inventory = Examining our disturbances and resulting behavior "on the spot";

Step 11: Prayer & Meditation = "Improving" consciousness twice a day = a.m. and p.m.;

Step 12: Principles & Service = "enlarging" consciousness through compassion.

In Step 10 the Big Book confirms that "We have entered the world of the Spirit", and confirms that "... we vigorously commence this way of living as we clean up the past". When we start making our Step Nine amends we begin living "Our Way of Life": Steps 10, 11, & 12.

Although the "program of recovery" is not meetings or sponsorship, it is greatly facilitated and supported by both. However, going to meetings and talking to a sponsor will not produce, or sustain the necessary personal Spiritual Awakening. This experience is the single promise of reaching Step Twelve. The "program of recovery" is a process of establishing, and then maintaining an effective personal relationship with Power, our self, and with others.

The litmus test and sure evidence of an individual having experienced this Spiritual Awakening, is a personality transformation – a measurable, visible change in thinking, feeling, and especially behavior. This conversion experience is positively disproportionate to the amount of work done by that individual – bigger than that person's contribution warrants by itself. It is done TO us not BY us.

We are not "cured"; we have a "daily reprieve". We sustain this awakening by practicing "OUR WAY OF LIFE": Steps 10, 11, & 12. This work promises to provide "immunity" from the spiritual malady. The consistent message throughout the text book is the need for, and benefits of turning from self-centeredness to other-centeredness.

Could it be the classic "human problem": loss of focus and the complacency of an easier, softer way? Has there been a gradual growth of an AA culture that perpetuates the misunderstanding of what is the "program of recovery"; ...of what is really meant by "unmanageability" and "daily reprieve"?

Has the spirit of fellowship replaced the Fellowship of the Spirit?

Perhaps the solution is to get back to basics. What did the first 100 do? They submitted to a process of ego deflation and personal transformation, which freed them from alcohol by giving them a relationship with Power. They fostered their new power by helping others experience a Spiritual Awakening through this same conversion process – giving them a daily reprieve; helping them maintain and improve their spiritual condition through a practice of "our way of life"; growing personally in "understanding and effectiveness".

Let's use our current spirit of fellowship to return to our roots of Fellowship of Spirit:

1. Accessing Power through the Big Book's precise "program of recovery" experienced in the Steps;

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We pray in gratitude, for all that is so freely given to us, and for support and comfort through hardship and pain. We surrender arrogant small-minded willfulness and the fear that creates it, in favor of divine partnership and faith. We listen for the subtle, softer messages from spirit, and the signs that are given to us throughout the day. We know that this guidance honors our free will, and is loving, peaceful, mystical, humorous, and wise. The rich diversity of humanity, nature, animals, and plants is available for our enlightenment. We can appreciate rather than oppress, and demonstrate humility rather than superiority, for what we fail to see and understand will destroy us, and what we see from the wholeness of our spirit will bless us.

We can have self-righteous or rigid thinking, morbid preoccupation, excessive worries, and pessimism. We might have heart disease, sports injuries, joint inflammation, or sexual dysfunction. We could have constricted emotions, anxiety or depressive disorders, excessive anger or fear. Perhaps we feel that we've lost our soul, our faith, and our hope. A holistic practice of purification and replenishment, transforms the energy of the problem into the energy of the solution. Whatever our symptoms, they are potent messages attempting to point us in the direction of healing on all levels, so that we might realize our full potential of health in mind, body, and spirit. We are after all, children of the universe, with a purpose that is far greater than what we consciously realize.

WWW.MARYCOOKMA.COM Mary Cook has a Master's degree in psychology and is a certified addictions treatment counselor in private practice. She has over 41 years of clinical and teaching experience. Mary is available for telephone and office consultations, and speaking engagements. Contact her at 310-517-0825. She is the author of "Grace Lost and Found: From Addictions and Compulsions to Satisfaction and Serenity", available at Amazon.com



2. Practicing OUR WAY OF LIFE to improve and enlarge our personal conscious contact, while helping others to walk this same path to their own conscious contact with Power.

We need both meetings and Steps to survive and flourish.

The spirit of fellowship acknowledges our humanity. Without it, we become disconnected and heartless! With it, we have a forum for freedom.

The Fellowship of the Spirit recognizes our divinity. Without it, we become impotent and soulless! With it, we have a formula for freedom.

Are we human beings trying to have a spiritual experience? Or, are we spiritual beings trying to have a human experience?

YES! Both are true!

Is it time for each of us to pause, take a breath, pray a prayer, and ask for guidance?

Is it time to set aside our slogans, our beliefs, our current understanding of recovery?

Is it time to revisit the original textbook, the "Big Book" Alcoholics Anonymous?

Is it time to examine our personal application, and daily practice of Steps, 10, 11, and 12?

Is it time for each of us to improve, and enlarge our experience of "spiritual awakening"?

Is it time for each of us, and each of our meetings to have a Big Book Twelve Step renaissance?

IF NOT NOW – WHEN?

THANKS for your reading, listening and thoughtful discernment.

My prayer and hope are that you discuss these thoughts with your recovery community, and take appropriate and helpful action!

Herb K. was given the gift of freedom from alcohol February 21, 1984. As a result of the application of the Twelve Steps as contained precisely in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, he experienced a profound spiritual awakening in 1988. Since then he has been very involved in carrying the message of recovery through presentations, facilitating workshops, and leading retreats. He has authored three books to help people access the instructions and confirm the actual process contained in the Big Book for experiencing a spiritual awakening. His books are available on Amazon.com. www.herbk.com, herbk12@hotmail.

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I shut off the engine and take the keys out of the ignition. There's no way to escape my problems. I have to face them. I go back to the front door of the meeting room. Deep breath. Don't look around. Eyes down at the floor. That fixed point. Watch the feet move forward. One baby step at a time. It's the way I'm able to accomplish things in life. It's how I was able to finish eight marathons. Facing any difficult task, my best self is that part of me that can place one foot in front of the other until a goal is accomplished. Don't look left. Don't look right. Don't think about the finish line. Watch your feet, one in front of the other. Again. One in front of the other, back down the long hallway. Now open the glass door. People are looking at you. Don't look at them. Fixed point. Open it.

I do. And I go in.

My blue short-sleeve shirt was soaked with sweat. I sat in the corner and listened. I raised my hand when the call went out for who was in for the first time. Two others were also attending their first meeting. They raised their hands, gave their first names, and said, simply, "I'm an alcoholic." My turn came. "My name is Brian." That's it. I was sobbing. I cried in that corner for a few reasons. I instinctively knew I was beaten. I was ashamed to be there. I was ashamed of what I was. I was ashamed of the decades I couldn't look at my reflection in the mirror. I heard my story over and over again in others' mouths. Not the same facts exactly, but the same pain. The same fears. The same shame. I heard those with long-term recovery talking about their first time through the doors, what they'd learned. I heard hope. For the first time in my life, I was beginning to see what recovery looked like.

Even though I wasn't entirely comfortable yet in that room, I felt I'd found the support of a group who understood. Who didn't judge. Who told me I was not alone and would never be alone in my recovery. The first day of one-day-at-a-time had begun.

Brian Cuban (@bcuban) is The Addicted Lawyer. Brian is the author of the Amazon best-selling book, *The Addicted Lawyer: Tales Of The Bar, Booze, Blow & Redemption* (affiliate link). A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, he somehow made it through as an alcoholic then added cocaine to his résumé as a practicing attorney. He went into recovery April 8, 2007. He left the practice of law and now writes and speaks on recovery topics, not only for the legal profession, but on recovery in general. He can be reached at brian@addictedlawyer.com.

