

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

STEP ONE

“We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable”

Homework: Writing Inventory on the First Step
By Dennis F.

It took ten years of blackout drinking before I could admit I was powerless over alcohol.

In retrospect, through the eyes of inventory (which allowed me to see my past as reality for the first time, and not fantasy); I am grateful for those ten years of drinking.

God permitted me to learn three lessons and did not permit my alcoholism to kill me or for me to kill someone else while I learned them. I learned these lessons the only way I could, “Defeat through drinking.”

If you had told me there was no point in me trying to use my “intelligence” or the “intelligence” of therapy to control my drinking so I could enjoy it - (“the great obsession of every abnormal drinker,” Big Book, p.30) - but that the proper use of my mind was intuitive thinking after having had a spiritual awakening, I would have said that I did not understand you.

I learned this lesson the only way I could, “Defeat through drinking.”

The third and final surrender I had to make before I could become a candidate for sobriety was to stop and seek a “higher power.”

I became obsessed with the idea that if the right woman, my soul mate, were present in my life, I would not want to drink alcoholically. I thought “loneliness” was my problem. I pursued relationships with lustful abandon. I was in the basement of my alcoholism. Lust and love do not coexist. I had lost the ability to love and didn’t realize it.

Besides women, I went through all the human “powers” I could: friends, doctors, teachers, family, loved ones. When there was no “false God” left I could turn to, I turned to a “Higher Power” I hardly believed in and while I was drunk I asked him for sobriety. God heard my drunken but sincere prayer and gave me sobriety a day at a time since that night on August 13, 1973. I, a compulsive blackout drinker, walked away from a drunk without completing it! Miracles are impossible things that happen anyway.

Now, if you had told me that the answer to my drinking problem was to stop pursuing my answers by pursuing women, but pursue a “Higher Power” instead, I would have said that you didn’t understand me.

Step 1

Yet, a loving God let me learn these lessons (while not letting me kill myself or others) the only way I could, “Defeat through drinking.”

The final reservation I had about admitting I was powerless over alcohol was that I had at least 15 years of alcoholic drinking in me before I would hit skid row and have to get serious about my drinking problem.

I still had some friends, some money, some health and some youth. I thought I was too young to be an alcoholic.

After a drunken driving experience where I drove toward a freeway ramp the wrong way with a date in my car and then drove against street traffic twice trying to straighten out the car, I realized (several days later) that I would never make it alive to skid row. I would die the next time I drove a car and drank and possibly kill others. I became “willing to listen as the dying can be.” (12 & 12, p.24)

After coming to A.A., I realized that 95% of the fellowship was “high bottom” like myself. 5% or less of the members come from skid row.

My definition of “bottom” is coming to that place in my life where I am even willing to ask a God I don’t believe in to rescue me. I have found that this definition is true of “high” and “low” bottoms.

One difference though is that I do not believe that alcohol surrendered me. I was not “burned out” when I got here like my friends from skid row. Alcohol softened me up and the program surrendered me. Three days after I had a drink, I was ready to drink again.

I believe that “high bottoms” like myself have to work to create a more rigorous program in order to maintain sobriety. If I don’t write inventory, I will create it.

Bill Wilson makes special mention of “High Bottom” cases in the Big Book, p. 33, “To be gravely affected, one does not necessarily have to drink a long time nor take the quantities some of us have. This is particularly true of women. Potential female alcoholics often turn into the real thing and are gone beyond recall in a few years. Certain drinkers, who would be insulted if called alcoholics, are astonished at their inability to stop. We, who are unfamiliar with the symptoms, see large numbers of potential alcoholics among young people everywhere.”

I remember hearing Chuck C., a prominent Southern California speaker, say one night that he was asked the question, “Is it possible to stay sober if he or she came to A.A. not totally surrendered by alcohol?” I was barely sober and sitting in the front row when I swore he looked straight at me and said, “Yes, it is possible and the only way it can happen is to work the first nine steps of the program.”

I totally dedicated myself to that answer since that night. I am so grateful for that answer! I believe now that I have been “spared that last ten or fifteen years of literal hell the rest of us had gone through” (12 & 12, p. 23)

Step 1

The realization that my life was unmanageable by God came more slowly.

The most painful memory of my alcoholism was the conflict on the morning after drinking. I did not want to see, touch, taste, smell or have anything to do with alcohol the rest of my life. I was equally sincere all of the approximately 700 times I felt this emotion on hangover morning.

The feeling of wanting to have “hope,” of wanting to believe that there was some way I could exist without alcohol, was combined with the exact opposite emotion several hours later. I knew I could not cope with life, with business and financial demands, with my family, with relationships with women unless I had something to drink.

Although I suffered physically from my drinking, what got worse about it was this conflict between wanting to have “hope” and knowing that life is “hopeless.”

The intensity of this conflict became so great it was going to drive me to an alcoholic death while drinking or suicide while sober.

The point of my alcoholism is to kill me! Alcohol is cunning in sobriety in that it seeks to convince me that life is hopeless (therefore, why continue living sober) by saying, “You will never get out of debt. Why try? You will never find happiness in a sober relationship. You will always be defeated and lonely. Why try?” The argument is concluded with suicide or an alcoholic death.

What is really happening is that I am realizing that my life is unmanageable by God as long as I continue trying to run it.

When God wants my undivided attention, he speaks to me through financial trouble or relationship problems, or puts me flat on my back in a sick bed. The lesson is always the same: to learn dependence on a Higher Power rather than making a false God of money, property, and prestige, or people, places and things!

The first action I took (and still do take) was to demonstrate to my Higher Power that I really thought my life was unmanageable, was when I got a sponsor.

It was the first time in my life that I let any human being into my innermost being. It would not be too long before the world would follow.

Sponsors and friends in A.A. helped me identify myself as an alcoholic and see that my life is unmanageable. No person can see their own shadow. That is one of the reasons we go to meetings to listen to each other. I can only learn something about me if I am willing to listen to you.

People who share their experience, strength and hope in A.A. are truly demonstrating great love for each other. No person has greater love than one who would lay down his life for his friends.

More than anything, I wanted the obsession to drink to be removed from me. Being uncomfortable in life for me is wanting to drink but not drinking. The only worse place to be is actually drinking. I yearned to be at that place where I could be sober without wanting to drink.

It was at this time when I got a sponsor that the obsession to drink was lifted from me. No mere coincidence! I suspect that when my loving Father saw that I was willing to take direction from a sponsor that he removed my obsession to drink since I no longer needed it to keep me coming to A.A. meetings.

The obsession to drink was a blessing in disguise because without it I would not have pursued sobriety until I became willing to admit that my life was unmanageable by getting a sponsor and pursuing the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of Service.

Alcoholism is a physical, mental and spiritual disease. The program is spiritual and “When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically.” (Big Book, p.64)

As I became spiritually sober, I realized I needed to become physically sober. I needed to watch what I was putting into my mouth as much as I watched the words that came out of it.

Alcohol is 100% sugar. I became aware that I was a sugar addict. This took many forms besides the direct intake of sugar or honey. Smoking and caffeine in the form of coffee, tea and soft drinks all released sugar into my bloodstream.

Due to my alcoholism, I have never been able to metabolize alcohol easily. I have the same problem with sugar in other forms. My body does not regulate the influx of sugar into my bloodstream well. This is called hypoglycemia (low blood sugar).

When I take sugar, I get a lift and then plunge into depression afterward. It is no coincidence that when I stopped taking sugar, white flour, salt, coffee, and smoking when I was about two years sober that mood-induced depressions also stopped.

I went through a horrendous withdrawal period behind stopping coffee and smoking. It was a special time of “be still and know that I am God.” It was a time of oneness with my Maker . . . a time of bonding. Outside distractions were removed that I could come closer to God.

It is very similar to alcoholic withdrawal. I have noticed that there is a period of withdrawal . . . a holy time . . . behind each appetite I have surrendered. The same feeling of withdrawal occurs behind surrendering inner defects, like anger. Sobriety has been a series of surrenders, beginning with giving up alcohol, that bring me closer and closer to my Creator.

I asked God in a sixth and seventh step to remove the defects of character that I may better carry the message. I take no credit for God showing me how to practice principles over appetites.

I have recently become aware that I cannot tolerate sugar even in natural forms like honey. I recommend for you reading the (\$2.95) paperback “Hypoglycemia: The Disease Your Doctor

Won't Treat" by Jeraldine Saunders and Dr. Harvey M. Ross, published in 1980 by Pinnacle Books, Inc., 2029 Century Park East, Los Angeles, CA 90067.

The symptoms that are longer lasting and are not immediately relieved by eating are fatigue, irritability, depression and withdrawal, and low self-esteem.

I particularly recommend Chapter 13 of this book, since it is entitled "The Alcohol Addict." It states that "most alcoholics have a hypoglycemia condition." (p.139)

"Take a tour of almost any facility where alcoholics are 'treated.' There you will always find a large coffee urn with synthetic cream and refined sugar ever ready to jolt the patients' blood sugar into a false life only to have it sink again and again and again." (p. 146)

The chapter comments enthusiastically on the work of A.A. but notes "their members still suffer the pangs of alcoholism even though they are sober because the problem of diet has been neglected. Coffee and doughnuts are usually available at their meetings." (p. 146)

It seems to me that biochemically speaking about our disease, we are in the dark ages in A.A., judging from the example we give to the newcomer.

I hasten to add that these comments are my own opinion and A.A. cannot be blamed for them.

Let us write a letter to an imaginary newcomer describing three ways we were powerless over alcohol when we drank and three ways our lives were unmanageable when we drank (keep the letter to one sheet of paper if possible).

Let us also examine in inventory form any areas of life in sobriety that we are hanging on to and not letting God manage.

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a). The Story: I've been slow to make diet and other health changes in my life.
- b). What Did I Do Wrong? I want to continue with old addictions rather than go through the pains of withdrawal.
- c). What Should I Do Instead? Pray to God for the willingness and courage to become whatever he wants me to be that I may better carry a message of attraction