

Emotional Sobriety

Andy C and Mike C

AA Gratitude Round-up June 2019

Please scroll down for the materials used by Mike and Andy in the Workshop. These accompany the audio file for the workshop. You can listen to the workshop without these materials, but you may find them helpful as a companion or later.

TWENTY QUESTIONS.2

20.2

The famous twenty questions of AA have helped millions self-identify as alcoholics. 20.2 is an attempt to help AAs who have been sober for some time but may be drifting. And for alcoholics, drifting is dangerous. Like the original 20 Questions, if you answer two questions in the affirmative, you should be concerned, answer three and you should take action.

1. You have recently said to yourself during the closing prayer at an AA meeting, “wow, that was a boring meeting.”
2. You have not had a conversation with another AA in the last week.
3. You don’t have a sponsor.
4. During the last 14 days, the percentage of days in which you have prayed, both morning and evening, is less than 30 percent.
5. You have not meditated in the last two weeks.
6. The number of meetings you attend has declined over the last year.
7. You are concerned about how you look at meetings, focusing on projecting an attitude of “I’ve got it together.”
8. Rather than focusing on the person sharing at each moment. You find that you are thinking about what you are going to share in meetings, so that you can look like a good AA.
9. Without talking to anyone or helping to clean up, you leave your AA meetings immediately after the closing prayer.
10. You have not read any AA literature during the last month.
11. When asked “What Step are you working on?”; you are stumped.
12. Your significant other has recently suggested you need a meeting.
13. During the last three months, have you rolled your eyes, physically or metaphorically, at someone’s share, thinking “I’ve heard this so many times before”?
14. Do you find that you are becoming more and more irritable?
15. During the last three months have you bristled if someone suggests you go to a meeting.
16. You have not talked with someone suffering in the last three months.
17. You have not called your sponsor in the last six months.
18. You are habitually late for your AA meetings.
19. You cannot see any personal defect of character or shortcoming that needs to be removed.
20. You are not active in any service work in AA.

The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety

by Bill Wilson

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(Also see: A Letter From Bill W. on Depression, from the memoirs of Tom Pike, an early California AA member, which is strikingly similar to this AA Grapevine Article, "The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety.")

I think that many oldsters who have put our AA "booze cure" to severe but successful tests still find they often lack emotional sobriety. Perhaps they will be the spearhead for the next major development in AA—the development of much more real maturity and balance (which is to say, humility) in our relations with ourselves, with our fellows, and with God. (When did this happen?)

Those adolescent urges that so many of us have for top approval, perfect security, and perfect romance—urges quite appropriate to age seventeen—prove to be an impossible way of life when we are at age forty-seven or fifty-seven.

Since AA began, I've taken immense wallops in all these areas because of my failure to grow up, emotionally and spiritually. My God, how painful it is to keep demanding the impossible, and how very painful to discover finally, that all along we have had the cart before the horse! (See page 114, 12 & 12) – God goes before everything – seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness) Wilson had 23 years when he wrote this! Then comes the final agony of seeing how awfully wrong we have been, but still finding ourselves unable to get off the emotional merry-go-round.

How to translate a right mental conviction into a right emotional result, and so into easy, happy, and good living—well, that's not only the neurotic's problem, it's the problem of life itself for all of us who have got to the point of real willingness to hew to right principles in all our affairs.

Even then, as we hew away, peace and joy may still elude us. That's the place so many of us AA oldsters have come to. And it's a hell of a spot, literally. How shall our unconscious—from which so many of our fears, compulsions and phony aspirations still stream—be brought into line with what we actually believe, know and want! How to convince our dumb, raging and hidden "Mr. Hyde" becomes our main task.

I've recently come to believe that this can be achieved. I believe so because I begin to see many benighted ones—folks like you and me—commencing to get results. Last autumn [several years back - ed.] depression, having no really rational cause at all, almost took me to the cleaners. I began to be scared that I was in for another long chronic spell. Considering the grief I've had with depressions, it wasn't a bright prospect.

I kept asking myself, "Why can't the Twelve Steps work to release depression?" By the hour, I stared at the St. Francis Prayer..." It's better to comfort than to be the comforted." Here was the formula, all right. But why didn't it work?

Suddenly I realized what the matter was. My basic flaw had always been dependence - almost absolute dependence - on people or circumstances to supply me with prestige, security, and the like. Failing to get these things according to my perfectionist dreams and specifications, I had fought for them. And when defeat came, so did my depression.

There wasn't a chance of making the outgoing love of St. Francis a workable and joyous way of life until these fatal and almost absolute dependencies were cut away. (The process of Getting rid of old ideas)

Because I had over the years undergone a little spiritual development, the absolute quality of these frightful dependencies had never before been so starkly revealed. Reinforced by what Grace I could secure in prayer, I found I had to exert every ounce of will and action to cut off these faulty emotional dependencies upon people, upon AA, indeed, upon any set of circumstances whatsoever. (The Apostle Paul's Secret)

Then only could I be free to love as Francis had. Emotional and instinctual satisfactions, I saw, were really the extra dividends of having love, offering love, and expressing a love appropriate to each relation of life.

Plainly, I could not avail myself of God's love until I was able to offer it back to Him by loving others as He would have me. And I couldn't possibly do that so long as I was victimized by false dependencies.

For my dependency meant demand—a demand for the possession and control of the people and the conditions surrounding me.

While those words “absolute demand” may look like a gimmick, they were the ones that helped to trigger my release into my present degree of stability and quietness of mind, qualities which I am now trying to consolidate by offering love to others regardless of the return to me.

This seems to be the primary healing circuit: an outgoing love of God's creation and His people, by means of which we avail ourselves of His love for us. It is most clear that the current can't flow until our paralyzing dependencies are broken, and broken at depth. Only then can we possibly have a glimmer of what adult love really is. Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Also Step 7 – the value of suffering – Humiliation and the final crushing of our self-sufficiency!

Spiritual calculus, you say? Not a bit of it. Watch any AA of six months working with a new Twelfth Step case. If the case says “To the devil with you,” the Twelfth Stepper only smiles and turns to another case. He doesn't feel frustrated or rejected. If his next case responds, and in turn starts to give love and attention to other alcoholics, yet gives none back to him, the sponsor is happy about it anyway. He still doesn't feel rejected; instead he rejoices that his one-time prospect is sober and happy. And if his next following case turns out in later time to be his best friend (or romance) then the sponsor is most joyful. But he well knows that his happiness is a by-product—the extra dividend of giving without any demand for a return.

The really stabilizing thing for him was having and offering love to that strange drunk on his doorstep. That was Francis at work, powerful and practical, minus dependency and minus demand.

In the first six months of my own sobriety, I worked hard with many alcoholics. Not a one responded. Yet this work kept me sober. It wasn't a question of those alcoholics giving me anything. My stability came out of trying to give, not out of demanding that I receive.

Thus I think it can work out with emotional sobriety. If we examine every disturbance we have, great or small, we will find at the root of it some unhealthy dependency and its consequent unhealthy demand. Let us, with God's help, continually surrender these hobbling demands. Then we can be set free to live and love; we may then be able to Twelfth Step ourselves and others into emotional sobriety.

Of course I haven't offered you a really new idea—only a gimmick that has started to unhook several of my own “hexes” at depth. Nowadays my brain no longer races compulsively in elation, grandiosity or depression. I have been given a quiet place in bright sunshine.

Letter from Bill Wilson to Ed Dowling

Discussing Steps 6 and 7 in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

The problem seemed to be that of persuading folks to make the absolute their objective without losing sight of the fact that most of us will always have to move in the relative. The most we could ask was that all AA's try to discard open rebellion of the “No, Never” variety. That would be to discharge one good pot shot at the absolute while at the same time we reminded ourselves that practically everybody has his sticking point someplace along the line. My observation is that people can get by with a certain amount of postponement but not with outright rebellion. These steps separate the “men from the boys” all right but if a “man” is to be defined as one who is perfectly and continuously willing, then the number of them must be quite small. **I'm inclined to define the “man” as the one who has arrived at the point where he can try to be willing in all respects without being whiplashed into it by dire necessity.** What we have said in Six and Seven appears to square up with spiritual progress as we see it in AA. But whether we are on all fours with A-1 theology I'm not positive. We really need some advice on this. Maybe you can spare a few moments, when in New York, to check over these two. It would be wonderful if you could.

Website

More checklists and resources are available on Andy C's website at:

<https://the4thdimension.ca/>