

Beyond Belief: Agnostic Musings for 12 Step Life

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See our end notes and bibliography for more referenced material contained in these pages.

ABOUT THIS BOOK:

Addiction doesn't discriminate. It doesn't matter how much we earn, who we know, what our education is or what we believe. We are all susceptible to process or substance addiction. Recovery language shouldn't discriminate either. *Beyond Belief* is a conversation about recovery and addiction that anyone can join in on. *Beyond Belief* takes a secular, agnostic approach to recovery and addiction. No one need accept another's beliefs or deny their own. Believers get clean and sober, nonbelievers do too. Believers have to guard against relapse and so do doubters. Experience, not expertise, is our common currency; everyone's experience matters—from the newcomer to the old-timer, from our more religious members and our realists.

Beyond Belief the eBook is an interactive recovery tool one would expect to find in the 21st Century. There are 365 daily reflections so you can start any day by hyperlink. There are over 120 index (topic) items for browsing or group discussion. Steps and Traditions are sometimes interpreted in this book in an agnostic language that is found in the rituals of some agnostic AA groups. There is nothing sacred about the original Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions; they were suggestions from our founders, written in the language of the day. This book favors adaptation over either dismissal of the whole idea or adherence to a premise that is objectionable. The *Beyond Belief eBook* is interactive and includes over 100 hyperlink end notes as well as bibliography entries.

What Professionals and 12&12 Members have said:

Nancy B., retired R.N. Montreal, Canada

I have been pink clouding it on the "Road of Happy Destiny" since January of 1976. I have always been an avid reader. When I came in contact with Twelve Step programs, I was compelled to read a large chunk of the literature from many of the different ones—A.A., O.A. C.A., M.A., and Al-Anon. I have also read many books from the Hazelden Publishers. The Daily Readers from many of these programs have been extremely helpful over the years, allowing me to tap into the spiritual wisdom of the world without any religious fervour.

I've found Joey C.'s book full of spiritual thoughts, with no hidden agenda. He pulls strengths from all over the world, and his comments have a way of making me want to read more. While reading these pages I did not feel that I had to *filter* out any ideas that were not acceptable to my own spiritual truths.

Before January 1976, I had no belief beyond my "finite self," and not much trust in my fellow humans. I now believe that there is a much stronger power available in this world than I had realized and it can be found through books like this one.

Michel D.

AA can, and must, adapt to changing circumstances and Bill Wilson was the first one to admit it. Unfortunately, members who have come after him are more zealous than our first members ever were. We have seen this dogmatism in history before of course, especially in religion. This is a very slippery slope to take.

I really like the fact that these reflections are for anyone who has an open mind. It does not cater to a specific group to the exclusion of others. All that is asked is that one keeps an open mind.

Melissa D., Clinical Psychologist, California

WOW—what an undertaking to make this book a reality. I have never seen a daily devotional book written for agnostics. I found the readings to be extremely thought provoking. I wonder sometimes since there is such talk about God at meetings, what kind of turn-off that must be for agnostics.

Understanding that surrender is also a process for agnostics, I would definitely recommend Beyond Belief, particularly for the introspective, knowledge-seeking agnostic, who earnestly wishes to grow emotionally and intellectually in the program. I think this book will be very helpful to both the newcomer and the mature Twelve Step member.

Joan E., sober since 1974

Where else are we going to find Leonard Cohen, the Dalai Lama, Erika Jong, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mother Teresa and Dr. Seuss all in one place? Rather than dwelling on how sick we are and how we need to work to get better, Beyond Belief often focuses on the theme of "You're OK, and recovery will come faster if you learn to accept that as a truth."

These reflections go beyond one idea, because they reach beyond solving problems through prayer—though there is nothing wrong with prayer. I would recommend this book to faith-filled Twelve Step members as well as recovering non-theists, with absolutely no reservation at all. Beyond Belief simply gathers some answers and poses some interesting questions—into one compact format.

Joan E's favorite quote from Beyond Belief: "Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it is the only one you have." Emile Chartier (1868 – 1951)

Dr. Amy, MSW, Ph.D.

Beyond Belief offers a spiritual welcome mat to agnostics and free thinkers in recovery. Joe C. provides readers with a thoughtful and enlightened year-long road map to self-improvement that reaches beyond the bounds of traditional Twelve Step thought—Bravo!”

Given my chosen profession I have had the opportunity to read countless daily meditation books—and this is a good one. Although the context is recovery from a 12-Step perspective, readers are invited to address the issue from their own philosophical view. One criticism of the 12 Step movement of course is that its dogma can be limiting—Beyond Belief seems to have addressed this. The quotes are cogent, the organization superb and the contributors are diverse.

From a clinical perspective I like that various schools of thought are called upon—Transactional Analysis, Jungian, etc. This daily meditation book provides a cross-section of spiritual and philosophical thought that is accessible to all, regardless of one's personal beliefs—in that sense it really is beyond belief.

Amy's favorite quote, “Go on a hunt for any areas of incompleteness, large or small, and you will not be disappointed. A burst of creativity will often follow the completion of some long-left issue. Clearing up an incompleteness gives you a feeling of aliveness that you can get nowhere else.” Gay Hendricks, Ph.D. & Kathlyn Hendricks, Ph.D. Amy S. D'Apris is the author of *From Surviving to Thriving: Transforming Your Caregiving Journey*

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PREFACE

BEYOND BELIEF: Agnostic Musings for 12 Step Life

A funny thing happened to me on my way to the new millennium. I realized that I had been a closet agnostic for a lot of my recovery. I had stayed clean and sober without the white light experience of an intervening God who grants sobriety, serenity or anything Bill W.-ish. We hear “fake it until you make it” in the rooms, and that’s what I did. Decades into my faking it, I hadn’t made it, in as far as feeling the presence of God. I felt like an imposter in Twelve & Twelve meetings.

Then came the Internet. I found a community of nonbelievers in recovery. Although a minority in Twelve Step culture, we are not freaks of nature. Some of my new nonbeliever friends had their own agnostic groups and some just fit their way into the mainstream fellowship, either apologetically or obnoxiously. I am now, truly, no longer alone. I don’t have to feign belief in order to feel like I belong.

There is no shortage of daily meditation books for addicts who are predisposed to a worldview that includes a deity. But when I went looking for a daily reflection book not based on a monotheistic worldview, I couldn’t find one, so I wrote one. It took four years. Art, philosophy, religion, comedy, science and the folk-wisdom of Twelve & Twelve rooms are all drawn upon within these pages.

This book speaks in an agnostic voice. Nonbelievers have something to add to the recovery conversation. There is no bias against faith in God or other deities. *Some of my best friends believe in God.* I don’t consider them absurd and they don’t see me as inferior. Non-theists are not intellectual holdouts. Non-theists are not more evolved. Beliefs are like favorite colors. If I like green and you like yellow that shouldn’t interfere with our discussion of addiction and recovery.

The Big Book’s chapter “We Agnostics” draws a line in the sand: “God either is or He isn’t. What was our choice to be?” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 53) Nature abhors a vacuum and a state of nothing can’t exist in either the material or spiritual world. This kind of binary thinking made sense in the autocratic world of 1939. But in a democratic, pluralist society, all-or-nothing thinking is a cognitive distortion—a philosophical assumption that everything is right or wrong, good or evil, superior or inferior. In this millennium, people can hold opposing views and be equals in the same community. Our Traditions, lovingly and tolerantly, make room for more than one truth. That’s a good thing, because the only problem with the truth is that there are so many versions of it.

If you believe in God and I do not, we both *let go*... then, I don’t know. Maybe God scoops up our will, puts His hand on our shoulders and guides us in the right direction. I don’t think so but maybe you’re right. The *action* in the Step that we both take is *letting go*. The theology of what happens next is an interesting discussion but irrelevant to getting sober and living well, à la Twelve Steps. Unity is not about uniformity of beliefs; it’s about a common purpose. Firm on principles, our methods stay flexible.

In the mid-1970s, when I got clean and sober, an Alcoholics Anonymous advertisement regularly ran in my local newspaper. It said, "If you want to drink and can, that's your business. If you want to quit and can't, that's our business. Call AA..." The ad included the local Intergroup phone number. What it conveyed to me was that if I wanted to drink, AA had nothing for me except warm regards. If I had no problem quitting by myself, AA would mind its own business. But if I wanted to quit and could not stay stopped, AA was one way that worked.

Our creed includes some common beliefs:

- (1) Addiction is an incurable, progressive illness.
- (2) One day at a time, we can stay sober.
- (3) Self-reliance was insufficient for us to get and/or stay sober.
- (4) Honesty, open-mindedness, self-evaluation and a willingness to make amends and help others are tools to get and stay clean and sober (recovery).

Some of us consider these tenets facts. Some of us concede that these tenets don't hold up as facts when subjected to scientific scrutiny. Nonetheless, as facts or ideas, they are our creed. These ideas are true for us and we feel it in our guts.

Alcoholics Anonymous started as a conversation between two amateurs who couldn't make it on their own. Others joined the conversation. They weren't experts, either. Since 1935, there hasn't been a generally recognized expert on addiction, prevention or recovery inside AA. As far as I know, none of the other 500 organizations that have taken the Twelve Step tenets and run with them have produced an expert either.¹ I have friends in AA, NA, SLAA, OA, FA, CA, Al-Anon, GA, ACA and other Twelve & Twelve fellowships. I call myself a qualified member in some of these meetings. In other cases, I have gone to meetings to support a friend or to satisfy my own curiosity. I have read and learned new things from each group's literature.

When referring to the Steps and Traditions, this book uses an addiction-generic, faith-neutral translation of The Steps adopted by some Twelve & Twelve agnostic groups. The Steps aren't considered sacred by every member, certainly not every nonbeliever. Many members with a variety of worldviews interpret, omit or replace Steps in a way that works effectively for them. The agnostic interpretation of the Twelve Steps used in this book isn't poetry and these Steps aren't universally embraced, not even by every agnostic or atheist Twelve Step member. I find in these agnostic Steps the essence of what the original Twelve Steps ask of us. They reflect the thought and action required to combat the destructive control of addiction and the artful balancing act of living clean and sober. Every member decides to work or dismiss each Step and how to interpret them. The variation used in this book is designed to not leave anyone out of the conversation.

The notion of taking artistic liberty with the program offends those in the Twelve Step orthodoxy. Bill Wilson was quite clear about the inherent liberty that groups and their members enjoy. Buddhists replaced the word "God" with "good" so that the practice of the Steps could be compatible with their non-theistic belief. Bill wrote, "To some of us, the idea of substituting

'good' for 'God' in the Twelve Steps will seem like a watering down of A.A.'s message. But here we must remember that A.A.'s Steps are suggestions only. A belief in them as they stand is not at all a requirement for membership among us. This liberty has made A.A. available to thousands who never would have tried at all had we insisted on the Twelve Steps just as written."²

Much of the language for the new millennium hasn't been crafted yet. The words "atheist" and "nonbeliever" describe someone by what they are not. "Freethinker" as a description of non-theists might seem to suggest that all religious people have rigid viewpoints, which isn't fair or true. Language lags behind culture. For example, all of us believe women and men have an equal right to vote. We no longer use the word "suffragist" to describe ourselves. One day, none of us will have to describe ourselves by what we do not believe.

Look at how far we've come from when the Twelve Step phenomena started. Society is more culturally diverse and more globally connected. Our understanding of addiction and recovery has expanded with our growing experience. Naturally, language evolves, too. Terms like "John Barleycorn" or patriarchal phrases like "This is the Step [Six] that separates the men from the boys" sound goofy to today's reader.³ In time, the language in this book will sound just as dated.

Some of the newest fellowships are devoted to Century Twenty-one problems. Who, in the mid-1980s, could have conceived of addiction to online gaming? OLGA is a new millennium fellowship that presents the age-old Steps using a new-age language. Each new fellowship speaks the language of the day. For the most part, the newer the fellowship, the less emphasis is placed on God and the less the addict is referred to using a masculine pronoun.

Twenty-first century stewardship of Twelve & Twelve fellowships is in transition. Around the year 2005, the first of Generation X celebrated their 40th birthdays. In North America alone, children born between 1965 and 1980 number 51 million. Some have been sobering up, getting active and preparing to captain Team-Recovery. No second generation runs the family business just like Mom and Dad did. Gen X alcoholics and addicts are by no means Baby Boomer clones. Demographers describe this version of homo sapiens as educated, individualistic and flaunting an unabashed disdain for structure and authority. Gen X faces our age-old addiction problem with an enigmatic attitude.

Right behind Gen X we see 75 million North American Millennials (Generation Y or Gen Next, born from 1981 to 2000). These youth were wired to the net before they got wired from addiction. Before the end of this century, the new bleeding deacon will be the multi-tasking, gadget-dependent, silver-haired web-surfer.

Hey, change is not inevitable—there is always extinction. When *hardening of the attitudes* is allowed, organizations will reify. Members tend to vote to keep things the same, more than to embrace change. In my own recovery, I experienced population growth in Alcoholics Anonymous from less than one million in the mid-1970s to a doubling twenty years later. For the generation of AA members that came before me, perpetual growth was all they knew. Early in the 1990s, AA population stalled at two million members and it remained +/- 10% of that high water mark for two decades.⁴ Smaller, newer fellowships are growing. Technically, AA population is an outside issue to other fellowships. Yet as the granddaddy of *Twelve Steppery*, AA is something we all have some connection to. Is AA more likely to sustain the same numbers indefinitely? Will it increase or decrease in population?

Survival of the Twelve Step movement depends on the delicate balancing act of sticking to our principles while adapting to our environment. We could grow; alternately, we could stall and shrink. Imagine if we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Twelve Steps, with the few thousand faithful members huddled around the carefully preserved 164 pages of the Big Book. Like other change-resistant cultures such as the Amish or Mennonites, the world would view us as charming, harmless and irrelevant.

Bill Wilson wrote, "AA will always have its traditionalists, fundamentalists and its relativists."⁵ Each camp looks at stewardship differently. For example, anonymity means something different to most members with twenty-first century dry dates than it does to baby-boomer old-timers. Spiritual lingo, rituals and what defines "outside issues" are all subject to review by Generation-Next.

Nonbelievers as a demographic are something that this millennium is getting used to. A survey conducted by *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life* (2012) reveals that the "'Nones' are on the rise." People who identify themselves as being unaffiliated with a religion rose from 15% to 20% between 2007 and 2012. While 13 million American adults identify as atheists/agnostics, another 33 million have no particular theistic view.⁶ This news falls on the heels of a 2011 Survey in the UK that shows that 29% of British and Welsh respondents and only 35% of Scottish respondents claim to be religious. In Canada the 2008 Harris-Decima poll reported that 72% of Canadians believe in a god, 23% do not believe and 6% offered no opinion (rounded numbers).⁷

The daily musings in this book are written in the customary *we* voice. I know—only obnoxious people talk this way in meetings. However, this is the customary style used in self-help writing. There are imperfections with the English language and they become even more pronounced using this *we* voice. Technically, "God of our understanding" should be "Gods of our understanding." If two people believe in God, the God of one's understanding is a different one than the other's—hence, *Gods*. "Clearing away the wreckage on our side of the street" would be more grammatically correct as "our sides of the street" but nobody talks that way. "Our drug of choice" should be "our drugs of choice" and "our inner-child" should be "our inner children" to be consistent with the plural "our." As an editorial turning point there was no way to be grammatically correct and not come across as awkward. Most daily reflection books are penned this way so *we do too*, despite the ambiguity.

As it turns out, each of the 365 pages is a continuation of an ongoing discussion in the rooms. I dare not take ownership of any of these ideas or interpretations. I have been in Twelve Step meetings, pondering the questions of the universe, for so long that I dare not draw the line between original thought and ideas crafted from the wisdom of meetings and coffee shops. I have been studying Twelve Step books and attending meetings, conferences, Step studies, service meetings and retreats for over 13,000 twenty-four hour periods. It's safe to say that this book captures neither originality nor expertise. The days reflect lessons learned in and out of the rooms and questions that continue to amuse or perplex me.

I don't hope or expect to find bobble-headed agreement with every thesis on every day. Agree or disagree, be inspired or be skeptical. Please treat these pages as part of a never-ending dialogue. I didn't start this conversation. Let's keep it going. We're all in this together.

SAMPLE PAGES...

February 23

“The role of a writer is not to say what we all can say, but what we are unable to say.”

Anaïs Nin (1903–1977)

When we are sharing our stories or relating to others in recovery we share the language of the heart. We try to be as candid as possible and speak our own unique truths. Clichés are a quick way to express something we all relate to. Clichés have merit in that they allow us to say so much with few words. But overused, clichés cause others to tune out. When we truly speak from the heart, we don’t need catchy phrases. Who knows what it will be about our story that will resonate with another? Not only does our candor tell our version of the truth, but sometimes another will identify with us and find hope.

We hear “I finally found where I belonged” when people talk about coming to meetings. We have all heard something in the company of addicts that transformed our hopelessness into positive expectations. More often, uncovering the truth is a process rather than a revelation. It isn’t reading, writing or listening alone. There is a process that leads to transforming us from being overwhelmed to being empowered. Like a chemical reaction, words and witness can sometimes change the teller and listener.

The real meaning of *selfish program* is that we often say what we need to hear—we are the architects of our own recovery. Our own words can sometimes be like postcards from our psyches. Have we ever heard ourselves say, “I don’t know where that came from”?

Do I speak from the heart? Do I sometimes talk because my own voice relieves my anxiety? If I listen instead, maybe someone else will say what I am unable to say but need to hear.

February 24

“Every second that you experience suffering for others, you collect merit as vast as the sky, and purify eons of negative karma. Each time, you become closer to enlightenment and closer to enlightening other sentient beings.”

Lama Zopa Rinpoche (born 1946)

Bodhicitta is a Buddhist practice—wishing to bring happiness and relieve the suffering of others as much as possible. No matter what level of nirvana or enlightenment you have achieved, you just ain't top-dog, Buddhist guru material until you reach the state of the altruistic principle of Bodhicitta.

No matter how wounded we are when we come into the program, the Steps and fellowship transform us into people that help others out of reflex. We can't tap people on the head and make them recovered. We cannot take their pain away. But we know with certainty that freedom is possible because, for us, despair was transformed into a glimmer of hope, and then we found recovery. We have stories to tell and we have time to listen. Addiction is such a dark place because it is such a self-absorbed state: our needs are endless and we feel alone. Weeks and months in, we can still be self-absorbed while the enormity of the Steps is still in front of us. Just being at a meeting is being an example to others. Showing levity about our own shortcomings can make others smile. Making peace with our flawed incompleteness can be a symbol of hope for those still undecided about our program. In taking on another suffering member's concerns and helping them find their own brand of salvation we are inadvertently freed from the bondage of our own preoccupations.

Six ideals of Buddhist living are patience, morality, generosity, enthusiasm, concentration and wisdom. We don't learn it then do it—we do it then share what we learned. These ways of treating ourselves are prerequisites to the path of enlightenment in Buddhism. As Dr. “Dharma” Bob and “Bodhicitta” Bill W. would have put it, “having had a spiritual awakening...we tried to carry this message...and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

Am I happy today? Does the happiness I feel come from the things and places I expected it would or am I surprised about what makes me happy today?

February 25

“Empty your mind; be formless, shapeless—like water. Now you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup, you put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle, you put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend.”

Bruce Lee (1940–1973)

Bruce Lee, a master of the martial arts, understood that two of the keys to meditation and deeper awareness are relaxation and fluidity. Stress, or more accurately, *distress*, seems normal to the addictive mind. Serenity isn't granted; it is practiced. It comes from within and is a byproduct of meditation, opening the door to strength and greater understanding.

Water is fluid and docile, but don't mess with it—water has power that can overwhelm human strength. Before dismissing meditation as something that will make us dull or wimpy, we are encouraged to try it first. Bruce Lee wasn't reputed to be a wimp. Like many things in life, anxiety and impulsivity can be fully refunded if we don't like what our balanced, meditative self looks like in the mirror. Reacting to chaos is easy, not heroic. Living peacefully is the challenge.

Do I see how meditation makes me more adaptable to my environment, able to fit in, and can complement my surroundings? As the water analogy suggests, do I also see the power and force that come from conscious meditation?

February 26
“Attraction is beyond our will or ideas sometimes.”
Juliette Binoche (born 1964)

“Our public relations policy should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion.”⁸ Our example to newcomers is important. It’s not saying the right thing that attracts people to us; they come back if they feel like they were heard. Ultimately, a newcomer’s fate has more to do with what he or she does and says than with what we say or do. Our enthusiasm for the newcomer to “come to believe” should be muted. It’s their choice to stay or to go. We are not cheering for our fellowships as if they were our favorite sports teams. We’re not the “best” and we’re not competing with any other system for overcoming addiction or codependency. Absolute statements make us and our fellowships appear cult-like. Statements like “See it our way or help yourself to jail, death or the loony bin” may be sincerely felt but are hardly scientifically irrefutable. Unsubstantiated claims are neither credible nor attractive.

What statistics do we have about people who leave Twelve & Twelve fellowships? We don’t do exit surveys or follow-up studies. All we offer that carries weight is our experience. Opinions are like...well, we all know what they are like, and the smell that comes with the territory.

Ads can let people know that a fellowship is here to help. One such AA ad reads as follows: “If you want to drink and can—that’s your business. If you want to stop and can’t—that’s our business: Call Alcoholics Anonymous [phone number].”

What shall I do when I catch myself being evangelical about recovery, my fellowship, my group or my own point of view? A statement like, “This I believe...” is sharing. “This is how it is” has crossed the line to *drunk-on-dogma* preaching; I see what is true for me as being universally true. How many personal beliefs or personal experiences do I spout off as though they’re universal truths?

February 27

“Avoid authorities who offer a universal blueprint for salvation or a map of your spiritual pilgrimage. Be suspicious of anyone who claims to have esoteric knowledge of the hidden truth, God’s will, the outcome of history or why we should bomb Iraq back into the Stone Age. The great spiritual secrets...are hidden in plain sight.”

Sam Keen

The small print in Sam Keen’s *Hymns to an Unknown God* is that to see these secrets hidden in plain view, we might have to turn ourselves inside-out first. This is true in Step One—once clean and sober the problem (addiction) and the solution (recovery) are crystal clear. However, before we turned ourselves inside-out, the abstinence plan and the suggestion that our favorite process or substance was responsible for an allegedly “unmanageable life” sounded too melodramatic for our reasoning minds.

Once we want to stop, we have to stay stopped. Where do we turn? Well, what’s in plain view? There’s the Twelve Steps. Why don’t we try to just read the black—ignoring the urge to seek out cryptic messages hidden in the white part of the pages? After the Steps, then we have some choices to make. We might want to get on with our lives. There is a myth that all who stray from meetings eventually die in addiction. Sure, some relapses start with skipping meetings but leaving the fold springboards some of us into worthy callings and purposeful lives. Not many of us will face this *all or nothing* ultimatum, but if the time comes, let’s not say “no” to life and become so dependent on meetings, in constant fear that the big bad wolf of addiction is around the corner, waiting to pounce.

Let’s say, on the other hand, we want to stay—good then; meetings can add value to a rich, full life. Our program can be a lifestyle instead of a single purpose solution. If we do hang around we avoid becoming zealots. It’s easy to tell if we fall prey to *bleeding deaconism*. Zealots talk in absolutes and they just aren’t funny. People or organizations that can’t tolerate a lampooning fear that laughter will crack their clay feet.⁹

I am looking for answers, today—what do I see right in front of me? Am I in recovery because it’s what I want, or am I doing it because I am afraid?

February 28
"You can't have everything. Where would you put it?"
Steven Wright (born 1955)

Come to think of it—having our dreams come true would result in a serious storage problem. Still, we find ourselves wanting more wealth, more love, more fulfillment and more meaning from our recovery. In the course of healthy, everyday life sometimes we will feel malcontented. The material world, with its commercial trappings, preys on insecurity, selling illusions about products that can satisfy the inadequacy it implants in us. The more we expose ourselves to media, the more likely we will engage in copious consumption and feel less contentment. Western world contentment has been on the decline since the late 1950s. What has been increasing is our exposure to advertising. Google "the story of stuff" for an enlightening connection between consumption, ecology and human well-being.¹⁰

Those of us from the *Dysfunction-R-Us* club have some core beliefs that may contribute to unrealistic behavior. We may believe that there will never be enough—not enough time, money or love—at least, not for us. We may think we are unworthy: "If people get to know me, they will reject me." Any of these core beliefs can lead to insatiable needs we try to compensate for.

Left unchecked, here are three maladaptive patterns that we may fall prey to: (i) Hyper-consumption: for most of us this includes, but isn't limited to, addiction; (ii) Resignation: accepting as facts beliefs like, "I am undeserving" or "life is futile"; and (iii) Overcompensation: masking our pain in false bravado and insisting that we don't need anything or anybody. These patterns lead to lives of isolation, possibly compounding the cycle of impulsive binging and purging.

Do I have ambition or resentment that comes from a core belief that there isn't enough to go around and/or that my needs just can't be satisfied? Today, can I remind myself that I am fine just the way I am and that I have so much to be grateful for? Is it better to want what I to have than have what I want? Can I be at peace with not having everything I want?

March 1

“This is a basic personality characteristic of creative people...the attitude of naiveté, of acceptance and curiosity about the odd and strange . . . the ability to notice and to remark differences in detail.”

Jane Piirto, PhD

In Western culture, naiveté and wisdom are widely treated as opposites. In Eastern traditional philosophy and religion, the two are symbiotic. The gentle quality of naiveté is a state of openness, a right-minded, limitless way of seeing. A *beginner's mind* may seem counterintuitive to addicts. We often come from impulsive places where we cope by saving time and jumping to conclusions.

Many an addict's life is lived with a think-fast, act-fast, live-by-instinct mentality. Twelve Step founders touted humility as a cornerstone of change. In being humble, in knowing we know only a little, we are open to seeing more than we have seen before. In the practice of mindfulness, a *beginner's mind* observes things that an efficient and goal-oriented, conscious, logical mind doesn't. As we practice a new way of seeing, let's not get hard on our assumptions; they are just trying to help. But new ways of seeing come, ironically, from regressing or revisiting our childlike awe, from a time when we experienced life without applying labels, quantifying or anticipating.

In our Twelve & Twelve business meetings everyone gets just one vote. Thirty years doesn't glean thirty votes. Three months in, a member is entitled to contribute. We don't take the “If we want your opinion, we'll give it to you” approach. The newcomer perspective is a cleaner, less biased look at how we come across, which is just as valuable as long-timer experience. Again, naiveté has merit.

Is doubt a higher state of consciousness than certainty? Is it another arrow in my quiver?

March 2

“We do not sing because we are happy, we are happy because we sing.”

William James (1842–1910)

James lived around some very colorful people. His siblings Henry and Alice were authors, as was his Godfather, Ralph Waldo Emerson. These influences inspired this original thinker in the disciplines of physiology, psychology and philosophy. He left his mark on Bill Wilson and our entire culture.

There is a relationship between our feelings and behavior. In a healthy, balanced state, our feelings influence our actions, but our actions can also impact our sense of well-being. We can counter restlessness by going to a meeting. We can forget ourselves by reaching out to others. When we are in the throes of obsessive-compulsiveness, we don't seem to read and respond to feelings with the same connectedness. When we are experiencing the extremes of feeling either unworthy or entitled, everything is chaotic and our feelings are exaggerated and unmanageable. What to do? Well, we know what seemed to work back in the day. We would check out into oblivion as a way to navigate the rocky road of life.

As we work the Twelve Steps, we become more integrated and connected to our environment and our feelings. Awe and wonderment will be experiences as will grief and fear. In recovery we find that there are times to resign ourselves to sadness or grief—it won't kill us. But we don't wallow. When the time is right we can think of today's quote. The Steps teach us that we can sing regardless of the weather. Singing can ease our suffering and/or demonstrate our gratitude. It is a sober self-medication.

What will I “sing” about today? Do I have theme songs for when I want to express happiness? How about to comfort me or draw out feelings when I am blue? Right thinking can come from right “doing” as we learn over and over again in the Steps. How can I steer my thinking by doing something positive?

March 3
“Be not ashamed of mistakes and thus make them crimes.”
Confucius (551 BC–479 BC)

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) helps modify behavior by identifying our triggers and reprogramming problematic assumptions (automatic thoughts). Understanding our patterns and cycles gives us a leg up at modeling healthy new behavior, learning social skills and living more consciously. The addiction cycle is circular. When we act out we feel guilt (shame). We relieve the shame by purging, often promising that we will quit. For predictable results, repeat cycle, increasing the dose as required.

The Twelve Steps break this cycle and pave the way for new patterns—a recovery cycle. “Easy does it” is a mantra that helps still our panic when we feel triggered. Reaching out for help, taking inventory, being mindful and changing our habits are all part of transformation. Recovering members who have had experience with formal CBT under professional care tend to catch on quickly, because they have exposed themselves to methods that complement our peer-to-peer fellowship. CBT patients seek alternative interpretations to experiences that used to trigger feelings of worthlessness, resulting from mistakes made in the past. Shame escalates addiction, which has become both a cure and a self-punishment and has started showing diminishing returns. We can curb the self-abuse that results from the idea, “My mistakes are proof of my unworthiness.” The new attitude may look like this: “I do what I think is best. I will make mistakes along the way. Who doesn’t? To err is human.” OMG—Confucius was a cognitive-behavioral therapist!

Just for today I will try rejoicing in my foibles. Can I try not taking my imperfection so seriously? Can I be empathetic to others' shortcomings, seeing as we are all just doing our best?

March 4

“I will listen to everything that is said so I will have some constructive ideas to take home with me and use. I will not yield to my compulsion to go on talking after I have made my point—and what I say will have a direct relevance to the subject of the meeting.”

One Day at a Time in Al-Anon

When we are new to the program, just getting to meetings makes sense. We go with the flow. Some members say the program is learned not by osmosis but by “ass-mosis.” Just get our asses into chairs, listen and learn. But when we have been around for a while and have worked the Steps, getting to every meeting isn’t a matter of life or death. Do we get lazy about meetings and their purpose?

We owe it to ourselves to get the most out of life—in and out of the program. When we do go to meetings we can think ahead, priming ourselves for being open and present, checking our egos and considering what we might be able to add. It’s worth reviewing why we are going to the meeting. Does someone depend on us? Do we have a problem we seek perspective on? Or are we showing a lack of imagination or avoiding another responsibility? Sometimes we go to meetings out of habit and some other activity may be more appropriate.

Hearing ourselves talk can be intoxicating. Once we needed the approval of others and we were willing to do anything to get it. We still enjoy approval but we don’t seek it at all cost. Some of us remind ourselves before the meeting that we are here to be genuine, not impressive. If we talk a lot, we can remember that passing is sharing—sharing the time.

Am I planning to attend a meeting today or in the next couple of days? What’s my purpose? Will I get there early (if that’s important to me) and be ready to get and give what I can?

March 5
“I’m not upset that you lied to me, I’m upset
that from now on I can’t believe you.”
Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

Oh how we want to put our faith in something out there—a lover who stays infatuated, a friend who will always listen, a bank account that never says “funds not available” and a program that shows us the light and the way. We want *it* so badly that we put people on pedestals, we kneel at the altar of false gods and we set our course for the future as the time and the place where we will be worry-free and wanting for nothing. Putting something, someone or some place on a pedestal invites wishful thinking and it allows us to delegate blame. What do they call today’s expectations? We call them premeditated resentments or disappointments; but don’t worry, it won’t be our fault.

With maturity we look inward for solutions from our voice of reason. Most addiction is borne of something that we think is lacking inside of us. We searched and searched for the right *something* to fill the hole. It was never enough, but we somehow believed that everything would be OK. Our escape from reality would protect us and the harmful consequences would never be faced. But if our addiction didn’t fill the hole, how would cutting off the supply fill the void? Many of us tried the program and fellowship, putting the Twelve & Twelve bus to happy destiny on probation. Becoming dependent on fellowship is less harmful than process or substance abuse, but are we setting ourselves up to say to the fellowship, upon our first setback, “You lied to me. How can I ever trust you again?”

We can’t cure addiction with a better artificial outside agent. The answers we seek come from within. The great thing about fellowships and programs is that they provide the experience, kinship and change of scenery that we need while we get our shit together. But they aren’t the answer. The experience of others will help us find our own answers and chart our own course in recovery.

Am I acquainted, or reacquainted, with a voice inside that I can trust? It shouldn’t be new to me. In my addiction, didn’t I always have a voice inside that asked me, “Who do you think you’re kidding?”

March 6

“To be willing to work for humility as something to be desired for itself, takes most of us a long, long time. A whole life-time geared to self-centeredness cannot be set in reverse all at once.

Rebellion dogs our every step.”

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 73

We are *rebellion dawgs*—sounds like a band! We don’t conform or listen to reason. Did our rebellious nature condemn us to addiction or did addiction warp our brains to the point of antisocial selfishness and poor decision-making?

What AA could identify in the middle of the last century, science can explain this century. Addiction cuts down our neurotransmitters’ functionality. Dopamine, GABA and glutamate work harmoniously in normal brains but not in the brain of a *rebellion dawg*. Addiction and maybe other obsessive-compulsive disorders create an imbalance of natural chemicals, influencing behavior, mood and decision-making. In a normal brain the consequences of harmful actions are weighed against rewards. When we mess with our brain chemistry our prefrontal cortex cannot effectively warn us of the dangers of bad habits and rash decisions. Our brains are dysfunctional.¹¹ That’s right, *dawg*—our rebellious nature may not be our nature at all. The question of which came first—chemical imbalance or addiction—is up for debate. Relapse, destructive relationships, narcissism, rash decisions about career, recovery or even what downhill ski trail we choose might not be due to the fact that we are born to be wild; our brain chemistry might be short-circuited.

Synaptic plasticity in some addicts, some of the time, restores brain functioning, keeping us apprised of right/wrong and risk/reward considerations. To re-train our thinking from grandiose to humble, from reckless to mindful, will take time and practice. Let’s not be hard on ourselves if we suffer setbacks in our sober, sensible, serene living.

Steps Four through Seven are exercises in reflection, understanding and improving my cooperative, proactive and compassionate ways, where only rebellion ruled me before. Do I remember progress, not perfection, in my recovery? Teaching rebellion dogs new tricks takes time and repetition. Good doggy!

March 7

“Emotions like sadness, fear, anxiety, or boredom produce ‘psychic entropy’ in the mind; that is, a state in which we cannot use attention effectively to deal with external tasks because we need it to restore an inner subjective order. Positive emotions like happiness, strength or alertness are states of ‘psychic negentropy’ because we don’t need attention to ruminate and feel sorry for ourselves, and psychic energy can flow freely into whatever thoughts or task we choose to invest in.” Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (born 1934)

Csikszentmihalyi suggests that different types of energy make us feel psychologically drained or invigorated. We know the difference between being in a good mood compared to a bad mood and we have all experienced changes in mood. Our psyches, like the world around us, are inherently active.

Laws of thermodynamics govern energy. Energy can neither be created nor destroyed, but it can be converted. Carbohydrates are potential food energy that converts to kinetic energy in humans. Psychic examples of energy conversion are anger becoming strength or empathy triggering crying. Like a coffee going cold, our energy can wane; this is called entropy. Negentropy is the “flow” in Csikszentmihalyi’s book, *Finding Flow*. Athletes or musicians call this being “in the zone.” In this state one can seemingly do no wrong—they have mastery, calm and effortless reflexes.

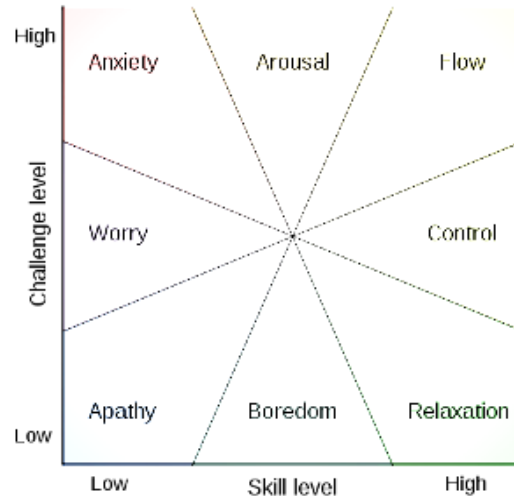
Flow occurs when we feel both skilled and challenged. Flow’s opposite is apathy, a risky state for addicts wherein we might not care if we live or die. We indulged to escape the blues and surge back to our *happy place*. Early in recovery it is normal to experience cravings when we feel down. Coping with boredom in recovery is difficult because we have always medicated away our apathy. We cannot always muster the positive feelings we want instantly. An important step toward mastery over our feelings is to be able to identify our sensations and feelings—good and bad. We can recognize that transitioning feelings from good to bad helps prevent us from being overwhelmed or reactive.

Do I know that how I feel is not who I am? What are my reflex reactions to feeling good or bad? Can I be more mindful of how I am feeling and less reactive?

March 8

“The more you lose yourself in something bigger than yourself, the more energy you will have.”

Norman Vincent Peale (1898–1993)



Sometimes just knowing we are worried, anxious or bored can help us separate who we are from what we are feeling. The chart here is from Csikszentmihalyi’s book, *Finding Flow*, referred to yesterday.¹² Flow, the opposite of apathy, comes with maximum skill (X axis) and challenge (Y axis). When we add challenge to apathy without skill, this makes us feel anxious. Being more skilled will relax us but only increased challenge raises productivity, which helps us feel good about ourselves. This plays out in a Twelve & Twelve fellowship. If we have become skilled in our own recovery we can still be bored. By challenging ourselves with service work, working with newer members or practicing these principles in new areas of our lives, we elevate our feelings into the top right quadrant of this chart where life is at its best (in the flow).

In today’s quote we see that a higher purpose, as much as any higher power, can keep us from spiraling into boredom, worry or other negative emotions. When we are in the flow we may feel spiritual or feel the presence of spiritual forces but rarely can this happen without a purpose greater than self-satisfaction. When we are new, the simple hope of living sober can spur such a pink cloud state. When sobriety is our new normal, waking up with a purpose can guide our energy positively.

As artificial highs intrigue me less, does purposefulness give me the buzz of good, clean living? When do I feel flow?

March 9

“One of the most paradoxical aspects of our recovery is that by thinking of ourselves less, we learn to love ourselves more. We may not have expected our spiritual journey to lead to a fresh appreciation of ourselves but it does. Because of the love we extend to others, we realize our own value.”

NA It Works, How and Why

What stands between addicts and the happiness that comes from having flow in their lives? A poor self-image has a nagging habit of sabotaging achievement. If we don't feel we deserve it, we tend to police ourselves consciously or subconsciously. It is easy to see that happiness in life is nearly impossible if we are not right with the world and, more specifically, the people in our world. In Step Nine we make restitution for harm done and we feel better about ourselves, increasing our sense of worth. We try harder and achieve more. Others respond better to us, taking cues from our self-image, and flow becomes easier. We don't put up barriers and others are our advocates—cheering us on.

Step Nine is about cleaning up our side of the street so we can look people in the eye, but let's not ignore what caused us to be either emotionally needy or aloof with others. Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding how early relational experiences influence developmental pathways and adult functioning.¹³ Abandonment, neglect and/or abuse in our youth can stunt development—cognitively, emotionally and socially. These handicaps lead to escapism, addiction and escalating risky and anti-social behaviors. Attachment disorder can cause codependence (hyperactive attachment) or intimacy avoidance (attachment deactivation) and some of us flip-flop between hot and cold throughout relationships, resulting in the mixed messages, emotional manipulation and hurt feelings that make up our amends list. Ego-maniacs with inferiority complexes are not going to treat others as well as we hope to.

There is a place for cleaning up my side of the street. But do I know the cause of my bad behavior?

March 10

“Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.”

*Tradition Three*¹⁴

The *Twelve & Twelve* illustrates tolerance of nonconformity by telling the story of Ed the atheist. Ed had to go, according to some of the *faithful* members, because Ed was insisting at meetings that “we are better without this God nonsense.” The believers discussed kicking him out, but how? The story takes some artistic liberty and suggests that Ed got drunk, found God and fell in line. “A Vicious Cycle” is the story in this atheist’s own words, found in Editions II to IV of the Big Book. Jim B., the member the Ed story was fashioned after, says “the only Higher Power I could concede was the power of the group.” Jim was responsible for the addition of the phrase “as we understood Him” to the word “God” in the Twelve Steps of AA. What if “Ed” had been kicked out?

Once Tradition Three came to be, no one could say who was or was not an alcoholic or an AA member. Each group is a group if the members say so. Membership, diagnosis and labels are all self-determined. If we had rules instead of Traditions, we would need enforcement and bureaucracy. Fellowships of all kinds get along without such things; the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop the self-destructive behavior.

Am I ever tempted to judge another member’s legitimacy? Do I treat everyone fairly, regardless of background or personality? Do I remember the importance of new members and try to talk to them as equals? Do I ever over-sell the fellowship or rush newcomers? Do I include newcomers the same way I do my friends in the meeting? Do I respect their views?

March 11

“Solutions are difficult to come by rationally. The reasoning mind is like a rudderless ship: It describes interesting patterns on the water, but it lacks a sure sense of direction. The rudder of inner guidance comes from super-conscious levels of awareness.”

J. Donald Walters (born 1926)

“Super-conscious”—that’s a leap for the restless addict whose mind strays in the first thirty seconds of meditating. The author of today’s quote, best known in the Kriya Yoga community as Swami Kriyananda, could be judged by a recovering addict as one who lives an extreme life of deprivation. We have lived at the other extreme. We see his way of life as impossibly disciplined and calm while our own lives might include more melodrama than yoga. We compartmentalize, practice denial and bow at the altar of avoidance. Right-living is not a place we get to; it is a direction we are moving in. Maybe we have more work to do than the next yoga student, and maybe we don’t. If the type of meditation that delivers this super-consciousness sounds like a place we want to be taken to, let’s do our best to think of it as a direction we are headed in—progress rather than perfection. If we feel like we are worlds away from a connection with this inner voice, we aren’t disqualified. Au contraire, we have the most to gain.

Let’s try periodic meditation for short bursts—maybe two minutes at a time to start. Let’s settle for super-conscious *lite* for a while. Sometimes we will be swept backward or to one side. So what? We get grounded again, take a breath and avoid *thinking* about the obstacles; we just point ourselves in the right direction again. We don’t go from unconscious to super-conscious in one cross-legged session. We practice, one day at a time.

If I outrun every opportunity for intimacy, if I constantly keep the crowd amused to temper my loneliness, if I caffeinate my nervous system with a pot of coffee a day, or figuratively with stimulation-overload, if I am always a year’s wages in debt and ten minutes late, just how exactly do I meditate my way into the light, let alone into super-consciousness? Can I be happy with my progress?

March 12

“Life is full of misery, loneliness and suffering—and it’s all over much too soon.”

Woody Allen (born 1935)

Pain has been called the touchstone of all spiritual growth. Regardless of what we think about spiritual awakening, we all know rude awakenings. Growing and learning often come the hard way. There may be some question as to the origins of what is thought to be a Chinese proverb (curse): “May you live in interesting times.” No one has authenticated the origin of this, but Woody Allen could be the inspiration for the modern cliché, “Life sucks and then you die.” He invites us to ponder our tendencies to worry our lives away.

Life is short. In recovery, we get a second chance at a life that was on a trajectory to end tragically. At some point, recovery includes setbacks such as health problems and other misfortunes. The poster child for recovery isn’t always the one who has turned it around from rags to riches. Maybe the poster child is one among us who remains stoic in the face of adversity. A second chance isn’t a guarantee of a front row seat or a place in the sun. It’s just a second chance.

Can I take my recovery one day at a time, regardless of what life has in store for me? After all, life doesn’t last forever. What am I waiting for?

March 13

“Once we adopt a positive mind, positive things will always happen. This belief, like all the other illusions peddled in this culture, encourages people to flee from reality when reality is frightening or depressing . . . The gimmick of visualizing what we want and believing we can achieve it is no different from praying to a god or Jesus who we are told wants to make us wealthy and successful.” Empire of Illusion, 119
Chris Hedges (born 1956)

Many relate to arriving at our first meeting emotionally bankrupt. We come to grips with our *insanity* and move away from absolute despair by changing our lives through the Twelve Steps or other recovery regimens. So what is the other side of the coin of despair? Is it the new us—glossy-eyed, giddy and buzzed on positive expectation? We think not. Dreaming about winning the lottery or yearning for all our troubles to be gone makes us easy prey for gimmicks. *You-Can-Change-Your-Life* books and seminars feed on the gullible—“a fool and their money are soon parted.” Subterfuge takes small truths full of integrity and extrapolates them into a seductive language that is vaguely familiar. Then a franchise is made out of our own wishful thinking, preying on our naiveté. The small print says that if we don’t get the wealth or relationships we are visualizing, it’s our fault. Any request for evidence is treated as subversion and met with clichéd ridicule. Thoughtful intercourse is suspect. Mindless group-speak is “safe.” Now that’s getting with the program, but the program turns out to be a scam.

Addicts are susceptible to magical thinking and the promise of utopia. Being positive is a good idea but not at the expense of the rich life that mindful inquiry and being at peace with reality will afford. The crazier our world gets the more “Law of Attraction” snake oil will be peddled as a cure for what ails us. Being motivated by positive psychology to take us to “the next level” is one thing; flight from reality to stave off despair is quite another matter.

How do I defend myself today from the allure of quick fixes or the easier softer way?

March 14

“How poor are they that have not patience! What wound did ever heal but by degrees?”

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Patience is wisdom. Meditation cultivates patience. For those who subscribe to the metaphor of the *addict's mind*, this is not as simple as it sounds. Meditation takes practice. Meditation is a discipline of both learning and unlearning. We who have obsessive tendencies fill quiet moments with rumination or activity, believing that these moments will be made richer by our busy minds. What we fill the quietness with is often clutter. Compare that with quieting our minds and objectively observing our thoughts and feelings right now. Regret and dread distract us from the present moment. Addicts new to meditation will experience boredom, frustration and/or anxiety as they struggle with mindful meditation. A class, a book and/or a mentor may be needed to help train us away from old habits including judgment, obsession and avoidance. Like a runner preparing for his first marathon, we devote our energy and motivation to finding time, keeping our promises and progressing, as Shakespeare says, “by degrees.”

Do I know that, to be truly free, I have to cultivate the wisdom to treat recovery as a process, not an event? I already have some discipline—I show up on time for events and appointments that are important to me. How can I apply whatever discipline I do have to practicing meditation so I can gain patience, wisdom and a clear head (by degrees)?

March 15

*“I suspect the secret of personal attraction is locked up in
our unique imperfections, flaws and frailties.”*

Hugh Mackay (1640–1692)

Is it flattering to be asked to be a sponsor? Often the qualities that attract another member to us are our blatant shortcomings rather than our genius or our acumen in wholesome living. Being asked to sponsor someone is no insult to our recovery, either. Someone struggling with anxiety may be more drawn to someone who has borne the indignities of this calamity more than to someone who knows only peace and prosperity.

“Why me?” is a good question to ask at the start of this new relationship. It serves both parties well to establish what the sponsee’s goals are. The needs of the newer member should drive the relationship. The best results come when newer members take responsibility for their own recovery. That way, both members are less likely to fall into old, unhealthy roles such as those of the *Persecutor*, *Victim* and *Rescuer*. (See endnote 11 for further information about transactional analysis and the drama triangle.)

Many sponsorship relationships are temporary and it helps to have that understanding right from the get-go. No two people grow at exactly the same pace and changing circumstances may bring the relationship to a natural conclusion. Hard feelings need not ensue. The end does not mean either member failed to live up to their part of the bargain. Seasons change, needs change and perspectives change. Some sponsor/sponsee relationships last a long time and others don’t. Some are informal and never clearly stated. It’s nothing personal. It’s all a part of the ebb and flow of a peer-to-peer fellowship.

Do I keep my ego in check when I am called upon to help in the program?

March 16

“Religion is essentially the art and the theory of the remaking of man.

Man is not a finished creation.”

Edmund Burke (1729–1797)

Twelve & Twelve critics love to point to meetings where, “We are spiritual, not religious,” is said just before reciting the Lord’s Prayer. They call us “a religion in denial.” That’s not true, yet we see where they may find compelling arguments.

We can be members without worshiping anything, or practicing or observing sacred rituals. Members who treat literature or meeting rituals as sacred have put human-crafted *stuff* on a pedestal. We should not put people on pedestals; the same is true for anything they write or do. We have what might be called a creed. We share tenets—beliefs that aren’t scientifically irrefutable.

We believe addiction is a disease and is incurable. “A pickle will never become a cucumber again” is a popular adage. These are not scientifically agreed upon facts; rather, they are dearly held beliefs. They are our truths, gleaned from the experiences of millions, but from a strictly scientific point of view, they are anecdotal, and to tout them as fact would be quackery. How many of us know why we are addicts? Who could say with certainty what exactly has kept us clean and/or sober? We each have a narrative of what it was like, what happened and what it is like now. We hit bottom and thought we were finished. Recovery was “the art and the theory of the remaking of man.” Our journey as addicts and fellowships is “not a finished creation.” “More will be revealed” was what our founders told us.

If I make things sacred, do I choke the truth out of them? To date, there is no *cure* for me, scientific or spiritual. Do I believe I have a reprieve, not a cure? Am I rigid or do I believe in healthy debate?

March 17

“Peace has to be created, in order to be maintained. It is the product of Faith, Strength, Energy, Will, Sympathy, Justice, Imagination, and the triumph of principle.

It will never be achieved by passivity and quietism.”

Dorothy Thompson (1893–1961)

Recovery has to be created in order to be maintained. Many of us don't have sanity to be returned to (Step Two); we have to create it. And the Twelve Steps are not a passive process. Will is not our enemy; it was part of the problem and it will be part of the solution too. Faith, justice, sympathy, imagination—are these not an apt description of the Steps that create peace in each of us? When a snake sheds its skin it lets go of the dead, dysfunctional layer. The new and wholesome skin, the new self, is already inside. It is just a matter of writhing, massaging or employing other kinds of work and energy to get the old skin off. Being likened to a slithering reptile may give us the creeps, but let's take what we can from this metaphor. It doesn't matter if our guidance comes from a higher power or an inner voice—the snake's shedding of its skin is a useful likeness to the process. Our better self, higher self or our Good Orderly Direction is already inside us. It's just a matter of tearing down these walls, this old skin that we have built up for protection over the years. “What an order,” indeed. But if we are willing—willing to work up a sweat—the transformation can begin.

Dorothy Thompson is not talking about our personal recovery; she is talking about what it takes to right the wrongs in the world. The great thing about our second chance at life is that we don't have to sit on our hands in white-knuckle sobriety for the rest our lives. We can apply what worked for us in overcoming denial, self-destruction and seeming hopelessness, to the world around us. We can make a difference. We intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us, just as *Alcoholics Anonymous* promised.

What am I doing with my second chance? Am I focused on more, more, more for me? Do I look for ways to apply the power of recovery to the world around me?

March 18

“In AA I have learned to take responsibility for my own doings. In ACA, I learned to stop taking responsibility for other people’s doings.”

Heard around the rooms

“Family” can be a very triggering word. Just say it out loud and get a load of the sensations, emotions and thoughts that follow. Large numbers of AA and Al-Anon members who also identified as Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACAs or ACOAs) experienced a myriad of reactions to the insight that their woes weren’t entirely cured by acceptance or by sweeping up their side of the street. Steps Four and Eight chronicle dramas wherein we enacted the role of perpetrator. ACA invites us to examine our life-dramas as the victim, enabler and rescuer, too. Many of our families included victims of victims of victims. Some felt relief from the quote above, while some felt betrayed by their original fellowship for “setting them up” for taking on 100% of the shame and blame. Of course, nobody sets us up for anything; we are peer-to-peer fellowships, each finding our own way, together.

In *Family Interaction: A Multigenerational Developmental Perspective*, authors Anderson & Sabatelli describe families using two dimensions: structures and tasks. Traditional structure (heterosexual couples with natural born children) isn’t the only way we define family now but tasks still largely define what a family is and how it functions. Tasks are the business and responsibilities inside the family, and in a dysfunctional home they can be distorted and volatile. An orderly and predictable environment is not provided for children. *Family Interaction* describes rules in a home, as well as *metarules*—the rules about the rules. These rules and metarules help to define the structures and tasks. In an alcoholic home the rule might be that we never talk about alcoholism. The *metarule* controls when the rules can be broken. For example, if the rule is to never complain about Dad, an exception may be made when Mom is talking to Aunt Shirley. Rules and *metarules* for breaking the rules—it’s hard for kids to get it right.

What was expected and forbidden in my home? What rules had exceptions in my home? Who was allowed to break them and when?

March 19
“I’m not afraid of storms, for I’m learning to sail my ship.”
Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888)

Recovery arms us with the tools to adapt and improvise along the way. We gain hope and expect that we can figure out the new and more complex hardships and troubles that are bound to be part of our lives.

Recovery isn’t a better life; it’s a better way to deal with life. We once avoided and denied. We emotionally fled or we overcompensated. In recovery we cultivate serenity, courage and wisdom in facing each day. We do the best we can, no matter what the weather.

Storms in life—if we’re fortunate to live long enough—are likely to get more threatening but we won’t go through them alone if we don’t want to. Nor will we go through storms ill-equipped. Still, if we are afraid, that’s only natural. With open minds and open hearts it is likely we will get through each storm and grow new coping muscles in doing so.

A storm is brewing. Will I be ready? Will I know where to go for help when I need it? Isn’t it true that the greatest struggles in life sometimes become my defining moments?

March 20

“Ever notice that anyone going slower than you is an idiot, but anyone going faster is a maniac?”

George Carlin (1937–2008)

Why can't everyone just save time and see it our way? Carlin plays off of our center-of-the-universe syndrome. We are the focal point. Those in front and behind are extras who scroll up late in the credits of the movies of our lives. Judging others' shortcomings, compared to our qualities, is egotistical. Judging ourselves negatively compared to others' qualities is also egotistical. It still puts us in the middle of the equation. Anaïs Nin (French-Cuban author, 1903–1977) may have beaten Carlin to the punch in her less funny, more existential explanation: “We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are.”

Why do we wag judging fingers at others? If we are preoccupied with the wrongs of the world, is there something behind this smokescreen of criticism? Our psychoanalyst will weigh in on this. Sometimes, we are camouflaging pain, fear or self-loathing. Criticism, like procrastination, worry or regret, is a coping technique. When we are right with the world, others do not incite our judgment and rarely do we encourage their hostility. This isn't to say that we will be conflict-free when living rightly, but we will pick our battles instead of exuding antagonism. Perspective matures. Like everyone else, we are trying to move forward in life, doing the best we can. When we are right-minded we see that others have needs and foibles just like we do. We get better at accepting ourselves and others as they are.

Do I look for fault in others like there is a reward for it? If I am critical now, isn't this an automatic thought? If it's automatic, what's behind it? When I catch myself being critical of how everyone else is “driving” along the highway of life, am I putting them down to make myself feel better? Would I feel even better if I was compassionate instead?

March 21

“It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power.”

Alan Cohen (born 1954)

It takes courage for us as newcomers to part with the familiarity and security of our old way of life. In time, we see how we would have been doomed if we had maintained the trajectory of our old addictive ways. But we do recover and stay clean and sober. The once awkward and absurd Twelve Step program becomes matter-of-fact.

Let's fast forward five or twenty years: consider the apostate. In Twelve & Twelve terms, this could be someone who came to believe in the rooms, began praying to God and got good results. Life improved. They shared their experience, describing how they were lost before finding their way. Years later, this same member wonders if what they believe is real or imaginary. The same turning point could be true of a staunch atheist whose search takes her or him in the opposite direction. Each of us should be able to say, “I felt so sure but now I doubt so much.” Being searching and fearless doesn't have to end after a year of recovery. A spiritual journey is a continuum. The same could be said for one who once went to many meetings a week and now finds that their calling is pulling them in another direction. Change is always risky but the alternative is to lose our vitality. We have mythology about those who stray from the pack. Certainly, many relapses occurred after we became complacent about attending meetings. Caution is called for but it is hardly scientific to suggest that all who leave will relapse. Once, Europeans thought that all who sailed west would fall off the end of the flat earth. That widely held belief lacked a few facts, too.

Rashness is foolish but so is rigidity. Is fear a servant that alerts me to danger, or a master that enslaves me in stagnation? Am I as open to change as I was when I was new to the fellowship?

March 22

“You may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer. To one who feels he is an atheist or agnostic such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as he is means disaster, especially if he is an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis are not always easy alternatives to face.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, 44

“We Agnostics” was not written by agnostics. It was a grave warning to agnostics: stick to your guns or face certain peril. But the book later concedes, “We know but a little” and “more will be revealed.” Many members of Twelve Step fellowships now recover without God, Allah, Hindu’s fave polytheistic trilogy of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, or any other deity. Many doubters have translated the Steps into a secular language that more clearly reflects their beliefs. Atheism is on the rise in America and more so around the world.¹⁵ A spiritual journey is a personal journey and not a universal formula—more so now than when this 1939 passage was written.

For skeptics, this Big Book passage illustrates the line in the sand. It infers that doubters are holding out, not willing to let the “miracle” of sobriety happen. Consider that for the 1930s, in Judeo-Christian America, AA was cutting edge. Today, atheists and theists share their stories with each other and neither need argue how one worldview is more enlightened than another. Neither would refuse help to the other. Sure, some will proselytize and some will roll their eyes, but don’t think that in the first days of Twelve Step recovery there was one harmonious, unified group. “Take what you like and leave the rest” has been around from the start. Being beyond belief involves seeing past the narcissism of small differences. None of us have gotten it perfect, no two members are identical and there is no addict whom we would refuse to help find their own salvation.

Do I compare, judge and fault-find or am I beyond belief?

March 23

“The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)

Today's author knew a thing or two about getting things done. He was a writer, lyricist, politician, botanist, artist, scientist, military man and lawyer. He is credited as having influenced writers Hesse, Emerson and Mann, philosophers Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and composers Beethoven, Brahms and Schubert. This would be but a short list of the people this German skeptic touched and the accomplishments he is known for. Sometimes when we feel like heroes for having suffered through addiction we might want to measure our accomplishments against others.

Before we can try to outpace this overachiever we have to get and stay sober. For members who relapse or bide their time on the sidelines, some of Goethe's words could be a game changer. Momentum, according to Goethe, favors those who have committed themselves to action. We don't stand before the fire pit of life and say, "Pit, give me heat and then I will put some wood on you." We commit to a course of action and "all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no [one] could have dreamed would have come [our] way" occur as a result of this decision.

Many of us say, years later, that "if I had made a list of what I wanted from recovery, I would have sold myself short." Our lives often come to be so much more than we expected. We thought that recovery would be a punishment for owning up to addiction and a whole world opened up to us instead. How much does commitment have to do with success in life? We look to powers of example for clues.

Am I adrift and waiting for something to happen or am I committed to a course of action?

March 24

“Shoes block pain, not impact! Pain teaches us to run comfortably! From the moment you start going barefoot, you will change the way you run.”

Born to Run by

Christopher McDougall (born 1962)

Born to Run is the story of an aging, battered athlete who refuses surgery, pharmacology, corrective orthotics and surrender to a reality that he is broken. But our athlete can't be fixed and must eventually concede to a diagnosis of chronic degeneration, abandoning the hope of a life that would include carefree running. The author heads off in search of the Tarahumara—an ancient, forgotten tribe of Mexico who hunt by running down a deer until it collapses in exhaustion, without the aid of a single high-tech shoe or electrolyte drink.

Readers follow a growing pack of seekers and runners who uncover troubling facts about how sports injuries have increased with every new breakthrough in running shoe technology. Manufactured comfort makes us soft—we break down more. Our ultra-marathon heroes reconnect with age-old truths, part with learned dependency on the commercial world and save their souls by sunrise. How is this a metaphor for people in recovery?

We wanted to win while avoiding the pain. Every new shelter from pain became a prison from which we sought a new escape. We kept piling on treatments to problems that had been solutions at one time. We fell to record lows and required better coping techniques—quickly! As the above quote suggests, the pain that we were avoiding could have taught us how to live. Imagine that.

What am I running to? What am I running from? When was the last time I ran just for fun?

March 25
“You can’t think and hit the ball at the same time.”
Yogi Berra (born 1925)

No one’s knack for the obvious is more infamous than Hall of Fame New York Yankee Yogi Berra’s. This same truth applies to golf, tennis, skiing and maybe to living life to the fullest. When we’re in a game-situation, we can’t expect peak performance while analyzing our mechanics. We can practice dance moves in a class but when the music starts for real, we can’t dance fluidly and think about dance, too.

Taking time to meditate, visualize or prepare for the day and then taking stock in the evening is how we get better at living up to our potential. In baseball terms, daily inventory is like reviewing the game stats, seeing what’s working and what needs improvement. But at game-time (at work, home and play) we trust our instincts. Time won’t allow for second-guessing and proper execution. We won’t always get it right but how else will we learn other than by swinging and missing?

Because we can’t do two things at the same time, if we are being bogged down with self-absorbed angst, a sure cure is to care for someone else. The Dalai Lama said, “If you want others to be happy, practice compassion; if you want to be happy, practice compassion.” A key word here is “practice.” We are reversing the addictive, narcissistic, hardwired survival mode that found us thinking only about our own personal stats. Compassion is about oneness, not one-upmanship. We don’t serve others because we are better than them. We aren’t looking for rewards or recognition. Everyone has shyness and fear when it comes to working with others. For some of us, time will reveal that we aren’t gifted one-on-one workers. Working on committees or setting up meetings can offer the same escape from the bondage of self.

I have a choice of two gurus today. Do I see that both baseball and Buddhism remind me of the same thing—that not doing and not striving (for selfish things) can bear greater fruit than focusing my attention on myself?

March 26

“A life without adventure is likely to be unsatisfactory but a life in which adventure is allowed to take whatever form it will, is sure to be short.”

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970)

Gawd, Bernie, do you have to be such a killjoy? Whatever happened to live large, die young and leave a good-looking corpse? Now, that’s some of that good old thinking that got us here in the first place.

In admitting that we were powerless and that our lives had become unmanageable, several personal beliefs had to be dispelled. We may have felt entitled to our comforts. We may have rationalized that it wasn’t so bad, that we had it all under control or that it wasn’t our fault—we were the victims of bad breaks and serious misunderstandings. We may not have realized that we were playing Russian roulette and that our days were consequently numbered. In many cases we were blind to the truly self-destructive and counterproductive impact of addiction.

Long after we accept the concepts of powerlessness and unmanageability, many of us will have to stay continually vigilant when indulging in life’s pleasures so that they don’t blindside our sobriety and we don’t get sucked into some new excess. With practice, we naturally recoil from old vices, with little more thought than we put toward breathing or blinking. We won’t feel deprived or incomplete anymore. We will be free.

Today, am I living a satisfying life or do I live a life of quiet desperation, sulking about being an addict and feeling hard done by?

March 27

“I also saw that I had been self-righteous and smug, thinking I was doing for Bill all that any wife could do. I have come to believe that self-righteousness is one of the worst sins. It is impregnable. No shaft of light can pierce its armor. It keeps its victims apart and aloof from others.” Lois Wilson,

‘Pass It On’: The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World, 168

Lois W., the original Al-Anon member, shares the classic self-concept of someone whose life is harmed by an addict's behavior. Lois was nurse, breadwinner, and decision-maker for herself and Bill. She felt pretty good about her efforts and results. Being unable to cure Bill of alcoholism was a blow to her ego. As much as she wanted to be gracious, she resented that other drunks could do for Bill what she could not.

Pass it On is a fascinating discussion of the embryonic stages of Twelve Step recovery. As we read, we imagine facing those challenges of the day, ourselves. There is nothing old-fashioned about self-righteousness. It is like a mind-altering drug in its own right. When we feel superior, all-knowing or persecuted, or as though we're on a crusade, we isolate ourselves with a barrier of uniqueness. Our true motives might fly below our own radar. DENIAL as an acronym has been bandied around the rooms as meaning Didn't Even kNow I wAs Lying. OK, as an acronym it's a stretch—please don't get all self-righteous and miss the point. With walls up and armor on, we lack sensitivity to the nuances of our environments as we cut ourselves off from meaningful stimulation and nurturing. We want approval and control and we are left with nothing but the loneliness of our self-justification.

Am I currently feeling unappreciated or indignant? What's at the root of my discontent?

March 28

“Don’t ever take a fence down until you know why it was put up.”

Robert Frost (1874–1963)

What recovery literature calls “character defects” are like fences. Each one is either keeping fear and danger out or hiding what is going on inside. When we vilify shame, ego, deceit, coercion, seduction, fantasy, resentment, fear or greed, we are susceptible to tearing down those fences without knowing why they were constructed in the first place. We are well-served when we treat Step Four as a fact-finding mission, not a confession of sins. Step Five is a candid discussion from the heart with another erring human who has experienced, firsthand, some of what we are talking about. Step Five is not intended to humiliate us. By writing it down and talking it out, maybe we can understand why these fences were constructed. What were we protecting? What were we keeping out? When was each fence built? Deeper awareness will come in Steps Six and Seven, when we consider life without these crutches and hiding places.

Meditation and mindfulness cultivate intuition and understanding. We relax, breathe and observe our thoughts. Do we think, “Bad thought—go away,” or “What is the good thought I must muster to replace the bad thought?” We don’t tear down these fences rashly. By treating our feelings, thoughts and sensations as legitimate, we aren’t in a rush to burn the house down, along with all the clues. Envy, longing, stress, disappointment and self-condemnation aren’t signs of failure. The *judge* inside us is type of fence, too. We note how we feel about these things but we are not quick to draw conclusions.

Some fences (defenses) may still be serving a useful purpose. Can I add a gate so I can come and go until the fence is no longer needed?

March 29

“Love comes when manipulation stops; when you think more about the other person than about his or her reactions to you; when you dare to reveal yourself fully, when you dare to be vulnerable.”

Dr. Joyce Brothers (born 1927)

Lessons in love originate from the adults of our childhood, movies, radio and first-hand experience. Codependency can be found in many families. And if that’s what we lived, is that what we learned? In the early months and years of recovery it’s not unusual to walk around with emotional umbilical cords in our hands, looking to plug them in to someone—“I love you so much. Heal me!” We may be more subtle than that but this preconditioning is at the root of the manipulation referred to by today’s author. We think we need to control and that we should avoid being controlled, and we also long for approval.

Somewhere along the road we’ve all heard, “You can’t love anyone else until you learn to love yourself.” The program teaches us about self-love (or at least helps mitigate self-contempt) as we achieve abstinence, reveal ourselves and try trusting others. Step by step, we learn to love ourselves and our fellows. Love comes as the result of emotional health, and not always as quickly as we’d like. We learn compassion and mend relationships by reversing damage and acting with compassion. We look for ways to love *anonymously*. Who can we do something good for without getting caught? Doing loving things without plotting reciprocity is good daily medicine.

Am I self-reliant in terms of looking after my emotional needs or am I still trying to fill a hole in my heart? Am I ready for love today? The world will never have a shortage of people who are in need of random acts of kindness.

March 30
“Were entirely ready to let go of all these defects of character.”
Step Six, *aaagnostics.org*

This step was written with some heavy-handed language—words like *entirely ready*, *all*. Imagine we have cancer and we are asked to become “entirely” ready to have “all” the cancer cells removed from our bodies. How about “entirely” ready to have “all” the plaque removed from our teeth? It’s not likely that we would have any resistance to these procedures. So what’s our attachment to these defects of character? Are they old friends—partners we have had for as long as we can remember? When everyone seemingly let us down, defects (or defenses) were there for us. If cutting our losses feels like turning our back on an old friend, then how about having a going away party?

Here’s an example: let’s say that in our inventory we see that in our relationships with others we hid behind masks. Maybe we have a favorite role like *the amiable one* or *the control freak*. We thank those roles for their years of service and protection and tell them that we are now ready to try life on for size without role play. Being ready means trying to live more vulnerably and to resist our fight, freeze and flight reflexes. If we are in therapy we explain this Step. Outside help like psychotherapy can help shed maladaptive behaviors. We uncovered a lot in the inventory Steps and we might think that discovering flaws and owning up to them is a cure. Old habits die hard. Self-knowledge isn’t a cure. Knowing we were addicts didn’t arrest compulsion—same with simply being able to articulate our flaws in Step Six.

Entirely and *all* are evocative words. I am reminded that every member works this Step a different way. There is no rush. Do I accept that I may feel pull-back from characteristics that want to stick around? Do I have the willingness to improve slowly?

March 31

“The chief danger in life is that you may take too many precautions.”

Alfred Adler (1870–1937)

Some alkie haven't been in a bar since they gave up drinking. They would be offended if offered a de-alcoholized beer. There was a time when some of us put into our bodies any substance that would take us up, down, sideways or backward. But now, in recovery, we are closed-minded to mental health medication because we are suddenly pill-averse. Some of us lived carelessly, and now we overcompensate with our kids, never comfortable with them being out of our sight or playing games that could lead to injury. Pre-recovery was a life of extremes. It's little wonder that in recovery, living life like a loose garment does not come easy. Rigid thinking or *hardening of the attitudes* is a challenge when we really need to find middle-ground.

Recovery gives us choices. Cautious of our decision-making at first, we ask ourselves, “Am I deciding or reacting?” What we want to ask ourselves or discuss with a trusted confidant is whether or not we are considering the pros and cons of each choice. What toothpaste brand to buy may not require a personal inventory but bigger decisions may conjure up our fear. FEAR is an acronym in the rooms: False Evidence Appearing Real. Fear can paralyze us and be a killjoy. Abstinence from the drug of our choice is wise, but do we have to be so absolute in every area of life? Taking chances and getting things wrong is part of the human experience and being more human is the objective of recovery. We made a mess of life. No wonder we can tend to be overly cautious. But it's good to let loose once in a while.

In what areas of my life am I rigid? When am I carefree and flexible? Is freedom of choice part of my natural rhythm or am I driven by risk-aversion or boundless need?

April 1

“Don’t trust. In alcoholic families, promises are often forgotten, celebrations cancelled and parents’ moods unpredictable. As a result, ACoAs learn to not count on others and often have a hard time believing that others can care enough to follow through on their commitments.”

Claudia Black, PhD

Dysfunctional homes have common rules and characteristics. “Don’t trust” is one of the three rules in maladaptive homes. “Don’t feel” and “don’t talk” are two more.¹⁶ No parent or caregiver is perfect and these imperfections impact us. To discriminate between imperfection and abusive conduct, we can look at the frequency and severity of the rules and behavior at home. Still, how we were affected is what matters. Can we trust people and do we have healthy boundaries? Adult children of alcoholics report hyper-attachment or intimacy avoidance, numbing out, having a constrained range of feelings and/or minimizing traumatic events.¹⁷

“Don’t feel” conditions us to doubt our instincts and internalize dramatic events. Natural expression is dismissed in many homes with statements like, “That’s no way to feel,” “Boys don’t cry,” and “Shouting and screaming is no way for a young lady to behave.” Anger is repressed and not expressed. “Don’t talk” stifles expression. Secrets sicken the soul, and shyness morphs into either isolation or overcompensation. Denial, fantasy, boundary issues and loneliness become normal.

Recovery households have their own unique mixed messages. These homes feature talk about wellness and gratitude and an expectation to act like everything is fabulous because mom and/or dad are *better*. Basic childhood needs are overlooked with the recovery parent as the centre of the family drama. Damage to kids can go unseen when a dysfunctional parent is still chronically narcissistic. The message to kids is, “Everything is better now—what’s the matter with you? Show some gratitude!”

Do I relate to any of these family scripts of “don’t trust, feel or talk”? How does that look in my life now?

April 2

“Unfortunately, we have come to depend on this quick solution, rather than experiencing and integrating many of life’s difficult challenges. As a consequence, we never fully matured. Abstinence is necessary for us, not just because of an allergy to alcohol or sugar, but because only when we begin experiencing life without resorting to quick fixes are we able to grow psychologically and spiritually. This is why coming to terms with my addiction must eventually involve spiritual work, the essence of which is the willingness to face, rather than avoid, pain and suffering.”

A Skeptic’s Guide to the 12 Steps by
Phillip Z.

Is growing psychologically and spiritually an addiction cure? Since the 1930s, *problem drinkers* were taught the dangers of inebriation and rationalization. As for the “real” alcoholics of the time, they listened, they agreed, they committed to change, they stopped forever...until shit happened and they fell off the wagon. They didn’t have drinking problems, they had living problems.

As this OA Twelve-Stepper articulates in *A Skeptic’s Guide to the 12 Steps*, if our brain is a deck of cards, we are a few cards short in the reasoning and maturity suits.¹⁸ We don’t always maintain promises made to ourselves or loved ones. Our spirits or psyches got distorted. A spiritual cure isn’t a magical cure. The quick fix we thought we found in acting out won’t be found in recovery. It takes persistence and strength of spirit to walk toward, not run away from, our fears. For some of us this spiritual experience is a mystical one, but for many others it’s more practical. Physical abuse, mental deterioration and psychic damage require a holistic approach.

Is recovery a mental, physical and spiritual practice for me? Practically speaking, what does that mean? What does spiritual sickness feel like? What do I do that is spiritually healing?

April 3

“Alice came to the fork in the road. ‘Which road do I take?’ she asked. ‘Where do you want to go?’ responded the Cheshire cat. ‘I don't know,’ Alice answered.

‘Then,’ said the cat, ‘it doesn't matter.’”

Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

Conventional wisdom urges us not to be an “Alice.” We can’t achieve if we don’t have a plan and follow it. What does unconventional wisdom tell us? The Cheshire cat doesn’t seem concerned about the outcome of Alice’s decision. Not every decision is all-or-nothing. When we don’t know which way to turn in life, we may be stricken with anxiety: “Do I leave a job or stay, end a relationship or work it out?”

A sage asks the right question. We ask ourselves, as did the cat, “What do we want?” If we have a clear preference then the direction is obvious. Sometimes, like Alice, we don’t know what we want. Sometimes the only wrong decision is no decision, because by waiting another day, we are another day older and no closer to clarity. Likely, neither choice will be a path to Easy Street or to irreparable damage. All choices have unexpected consequences. Travelling in either direction will bring unpredictable adversity and/or opportunity. How we deal with the opportunity and adversity is what matters. Rash decisions don’t serve us well but many choices will have to be made without all the facts—a best guess will just have to do.

Do I tend to stand by my choices in life or second guess everything I do? Is getting it wrong being wrong, especially when I cannot anticipate the outcome?

April 4

“Steps and Traditions represent the approximate truths which we need for our particular purpose. The more we practice them, the more we like them. So there is little doubt that AA principles will continue to be advocated in the form they stand now. If our basics are so firmly fixed as all this, then what is there left to change or to improve? The answer will immediately occur to us. While we need not alter our truths, we can surely improve their application to ourselves, to AA as a whole and to our relation with the world around us.”

Bill W., A.A. Grapevine, February 1961¹⁹

Bill Wilson touches on the risk/reward of change. AA's founders left the world resigned to the idea that AA had to adapt to survive. Bill's hope was that the fellowship would have the resolve to make hard decisions without the luxury of certainty, just as he and Dr. Bob had. By the time of this 1961 writing, new anonymous programs were springing up: Al-Anon, Narcotics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous. These new fellowships took their opportunities and recognized, “While we need not alter our truths, we can surely improve their application.”

Today, there are Twelve & Twelve fellowships for multiple substances and processes. Food, sex, drug, smoking addicts and co-addicts enjoy a multiple-choice of fellowships. This century brought internet-gaming, internet-anon fellowships and teen-based recovery. All of these new groups had a much easier time adapting the language, rituals and literature to present day culture. AA is slow to adapt. Why is that? Fear of change is a greater motivator than desire for change. If change is resisted, membership will erode. If membership ever shrinks to a point that results in the world viewing AA as quaint, harmless and irrelevant, fear of extinction may outgrow fear of change.

Is my role as a steward to reify the message and canonize founders, or to prepare the program for the next generation? In what ways could my fellowship be more inviting to today's newcomer? Can changes be made without forfeiting the integrity and intention of these proven principles? The truth is in the integrity of the principles, not the language they were written in.

April 5

“Many of the things I thought I did unselfishly turned out to be pure rationalizations to get my own way about something. This disclosure doubled my urge to live by the Twelve Steps as thoroughly as I could.”

An Al-Anon founder

So let’s get this straight—we can’t trust our own thoughts. “My brain would kill me if it didn’t need the transportation” is one morbid anecdote heard around the rooms. Another is “How can you tell when a codependent is rationalizing? Their lips are moving.” Our brains black out certain truths, rewrite inconvenient personal histories and dress up our motives to adapt to charades of our self-concepts. When we have moments of clarity like the one mentioned above, what to do? Do we cling to illusion or dig deeper for greater clarity? Our self-awareness enhances life for us and the ones we love.

The classic literary conflicts—man vs. himself, man vs. man and man vs. nature—make for a thrilling movie, play or song. It is not so entertaining in real life. For recovering addicts and codependents it’s easy to personify our deluded alter egos and blame our *addict minds*. We learn to take ownership of the games our brains play on us. Today, we are stone-cold-sober and we still entertain delusions. Addicts don’t have a monopoly on self-deceit. We are like everyone else, just more so. We feel more, think in overdrive and rationalization has its way with our childlike minds.

Both vigilance and self-compassion are keys that unlock our potential. If we can remember that nobody has to be blamed, there’s less need to criticize ourselves or others. We can accept our lives, our pasts and others with candor and compassion. The goal is to understand, not to blame.

Do I feel entitled to my point of view? Do I stand by and take responsibility for my attitude and opinions? Do I tend to see my view of things as the ultimate truth?

April 6

“So be sure when you step. Step with care and great tact and remember that Life’s a Great Balancing Act. Just never forget to be dexterous and deft. And never mix up your right foot with your left. And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)”

Oh, the Places You’ll Go! by Dr. Seuss

Balance, *Part I*: Before recovery we lived lives of extremes—binging and purging, acting out and going on the wagon. Grinning and bearing the gut-wrenching transition on the way up and on the way down—this was par for the course in our lives of chaos. Peace and moderation may make us feel restless or uncomfortable. Duh—recovery is unnatural, at first anyway. Regret or a sense of impending doom can disturb our efforts to stay in the moment. A balanced life may seem lacking, leaving us mourning the intensity of the gambler’s life. Many of us admit we don’t know what balance looks like or feels like. What limited experiences do we have to draw upon? Balance is unfamiliar to the recovery community. Driving a car on a dark road at night, we see only the little bit of life that appears in our headlights. We can get all the way across the continent without seeing the whole road; a little at a time is good enough.

Today will I “step with care and great tact and remember that Life’s a Great Balancing Act”? Is my identity tied to “living on the edge”? Do others see me as a chaotic character or do I give others the impression I am balanced and level-headed? Did I have a “street” persona that I fear will be lost in recovery? Do I feel whole, or like the hole in the donut now that I am in recovery? Tomorrow we reflect more on balance in a mad, mad world.

April 7

"I find it kind of funny. I find it kind of sad. The dreams in which I'm dying are the best I've ever had. I find it hard to tell you 'cause I find it hard to take. When people run in circles it's a very, very mad world."

"Mad World" by Roland Orzabal

Balance, *Part II*: Dreams of death can be about change and transformation. The death card in Tarot is about one thing ending and another beginning. When a snake sheds its old skin it doesn't die; it begins a more vibrant life. How do recovery, balance and enlightenment look in a mad world?

Our world seems to be in perpetual chaos. In a consumer-based world we are pressured to use-and-dispose and then shamed about our treatment of the environment. We are sold the dreams of "have it now and pay later," and then debt brings anxiety and guilt so we buy more to relieve tension. Many of us cycle through excess, compulsion and obsession in step with the madness of the world. We may have rationalized that in our extremes we were embracing richer, fuller lives. If someone had one foot in a bucket of ice and the other foot in a bucket of boiling water, would they be perfectly comfortable? No—we can't combat one extreme with an opposite extreme. Actuarial calculations might give the thumbs up to a rich, full life, averaging out these two extremes, but in real life we are neither fulfilled nor comfortable. Opposite extremes beget unmanageability and lives of constant upheaval.

Early in recovery we may face resistance and temptation from enablers. We won't likely have placed real trust in our new recovery friends. A new spiritual life in a material world may look out of place if chaos is still all around us.

How well do I maintain my equilibrium in a mad, mad world?

April 8

*"I thought how unpleasant it was to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse,
perhaps, to be locked in."*

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Step Nine unlocks us from a final state of emotional solitary confinement. Freeing ourselves from regret, shame and guilt happens by degrees from Step to Step. In Step One, we resisted admitting who and what we were. We were selective about what we revealed to others, and that included confiding in people about our addictions. We were "locked in," ashamed and isolating behind a façade.

Many of us were still phonies in meetings and the truth revealed in Step Four was a hard pill to swallow. The risk of exposing the truth in Step Five, saying our secrets out loud to another human being, has to be experienced to be understood. In a very big way, the door behind which we had locked ourself was opened and our fate rested on how we were received. Right-sizing of our wrongs occurred in reflecting on these truths in the months that followed Step Five. In solitude, the severity of our worst secrets had been over-blown. The light of day showed that we were flawed, not evil. Other shortcomings that we had minimized had to be faced. We took responsibility. Steps Six and Seven helped us become authentic.

When we face the victims of our misdeeds we have new clarity and personal responsibility. We still risk ridicule, rejection or being "locked out." No one is obligated to accept our apologies. But we are right with the world, whatever the consequences. We are not hiding behind a wall of excuses and blame. Taking responsibility makes us feel better about ourselves and increased self-worth helps us feel more connected to others. We can look the world in the eye, maybe for the first time in our lives. It is hard to describe to someone who hasn't experienced it first-hand what living without shame is like.

Have I experienced this new freedom and a new happiness? Am I no longer locked in?

April 9

“If I leave this Twelve Step meeting and get hit by a bus, don’t take me to another Twelve Step meeting—take me to a hospital.”

Father Joe Martin (1924–2009)

Recovery programs do solve a lot of problems in life. The Twelve Steps have been defined as a toolbox of wrenches that can fit any nut. Many of us come here to conquer one problem and get on with life. To our surprise, working the Steps has more far-reaching value. We read our program literature over and over again not because this is pleasure reading or because the Twelve Steps are a cure-all. Reading is one of the rituals that some of us incorporate into a recovery lifestyle.

But as pointed out above, not every problem calls for a Twelve Step remedy. Many problems need professional and/or expert help, help we can’t expect to find in meetings. We may need a guidance counselor, relationship therapist, psychiatrist, trainer or medical doctor. Because the program has helped in more ways than we bargained for, we run the risk of putting the program of recovery on a fix-all pedestal. Self-help fellowships are people sharing their experience with each other—no less and no more.

Most of us have problems other than addiction. Some of us are candid about what ails us and what we are taking for it. Some of us keep those cards close to our chest. Addicts tend to need help in other mental health areas. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports that alcoholics are two to three times more likely to have anxiety disorders or other (concurrent) psychiatric disorders than members of the general population.²⁰

Do I have right-sized expectations about my program and fellowship? Have I ever caught myself talking about Twelve Step recovery as a cure-all or a one-stop shop?

April 10

*“Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.”
Tradition Four²¹*

With all this autonomy, it is remarkable how meetings of the same fellowship can look so similar when compared to each other. On the other hand, members who recover in one place and move to another town are often uncomfortable or put off by the subtle variances of meeting style in the new town—the meetings feel different. We may think that the new town has it wrong. The practices in our home group seem sacred—as if there was a *right* way of doing things. We resist change and we crave familiarity. Each meeting can conduct itself the way the members choose and, ultimately, it must be responsible for itself. If one meeting can't afford to keep its doors open, it closes—other groups don't pitch in to keep it afloat, although individual members may attend a struggling meeting to show support.

Some meetings are just for men, or women, or run by members based on age, creed or sexual orientation. Some meetings are designed for new members. The only rules are rules that each group's members agree on. What is read, written, said or believed at one meeting is of no concern to anyone else. Service works in an upside-down triangle: the service structure does the bidding of groups. It doesn't dictate or police what goes on inside each group's walls. If we don't like what a group is doing we ask what's behind our intolerance or strong feelings. Natural selection or *God's will*, if you like, takes care of any group that is so far out of line they have distorted the program's principles.

Do I encourage autonomy within my group and with others? Do I show interest in issues that affect the fellowship as a whole? Do I do my share of the work? I may consider myself a steward of our fellowship's future. Many who hold our fellowship as dearly as I do don't see eye-to-eye with me. Can I remember “Vive la différence”?

April 11

“Scepticism is . . . a form of belief. Dogma cannot be abandoned; it can only be revised in view of some more elementary dogma which it has not yet occurred to the sceptic to doubt.”

George Santayana (1863–1952)

This uncongenial pragmatist who studied under both William James and John Dewey didn't accept anything as *Gospel*. Santayana invites us to doubt our own skepticism. Doubt is healthy, natural and a sure way to keep an open mind. But any habit can start showing signs of being a schema. There is a difference between skepticism and cynicism. A logical disposition and constant need for evidence can limit as well as enhance our lives. What we believe can get stale.

To navigate through life, some of us use our gut feelings, the Steps or our wits. If we are true to the process, no matter what our leanings, counter-intuitive skills can become complementary skills, as we learn new ways to perceive both our world and our condition. If we keep exercising our thinking and feeling, in time, our coping and observation skills will evolve.

We shouldn't cling too tightly to our assumptions or ways of seeing. Do we really want to think exactly the same way we do today, a year or a decade from now? The risk of only travelling in circles of people who think, act and talk like us is that we reinforce tunnel vision. More of the same creates a consensus on more of the same. Not being able to learn from those who think differently from us is like only eating protein, only vegetables or only carbohydrates. We need a rich idea-diet to keep life from being made unmanageable by our overconfidence. Not being married to our beliefs can be even more peaceful than being absolutely sure. It can reduce the chances of becoming drunk on our own dogma.

Do I clutch my beliefs with white knuckles? Am I open to new ways of seeing?

April 12
“We must be the change we wish to see in the world.”
Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948)

Have our lives transformed from being self-destructive to being productive? We hear it said that gratitude is a behavior as much as it is a feeling. Gratitude may be a feeling about our satisfaction for the way life is; alternatively, it could be an action or our duty to make a positive difference in the lives of others. If we want our meetings, our homes or workplaces to be better, we lead by example. Standing up against discrimination or making our community more just or more environmentally sound would be applying Step Twelve to our lives.

In time, we will know the difference between bandwagon bitching and constructively making a difference in the world. We will intuitively know the difference between doing something for accolades and doing something for altruistic reasons. We can draw the line between enabling and being helpful. We’ll never be perfect but a desire to “be the change we wish to see in the world” is healing. Choosing a cause requires consideration. Our house has to be in order—charity begins at home. We worked so hard to get well; why not keep it by giving it away? Empathy as an action rewires self-centered habitual impulses. Service, in or out of the fellowship, renews our energy where being self-absorbed can drain us. For some of us, service starts in our fellowship, but there’s a bigger world out there if and when we want to lend a hand.

Like so many others, I came here as a taker, a parasite and a needy addict. Today, what can I do to make the world a better place?

April 13

“A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality.”

John Lennon (1940–1980)

We addicts dreamed and talked of turning our lives around, without recovery materializing on our own. In fellowship “we can do together what we could not do by ourselves.” This is a socially constructed reality in Twelve Step life—a dream we dream together. Addiction as a disease is another widely held construct that gives order and structure to our worldviews. Consensus doesn’t make a belief true, just popular. The world’s most popular *truths* are Abrahamic faiths (obedience to one deity by name, being either Allah or God.) To half the world this is a truth/dream shared with likeminded people. The other half of the world would call such beliefs mythology. Speaking of our beliefs as universal truths will always make us look foolish to someone.

Families each have their own dreams/truths. Some psychologists look at the cohesiveness and functionality of family systems in what they call a Circumplex Model.²² Imagine a compass with *Enmeshed* as North and *Disengaged* as South, measuring relative cohesion. *Rigid* as East and *Chaotic* as West will measure family adaptability. Perfectly healthy would be right in the middle. Some social challenges come from being stretched between two of these poles. The Enmeshed/Rigid (NE) home demands obedience and produces malcontent, irritable children. Enmeshed/Chaotic (NW) homes have kids running the show when small and acting rebellious, bossy and unmotivated by the time they leave. Disengaged/Rigid (SE) kids feel uncared for, with rules that are random or unfair. Stunted maturity leads to psychological problems. Parents in Disengaged/Chaotic (SW) homes don’t care what the kids do as long as it doesn’t put the parent(s) out. This is a breeding ground for underachieving loners. Dysfunctional homes stretch family dynamics to unpredictable extremes. For kids, that’s a nightmare, not a dream. When we look back we find that many of the “realities” in childhood can be changed.

Do I feel that I have shared dreams with my family and fellowship? Consensus is a constructed reality, not the truth. Do I get dogmatic about my “realities,” insisting they are universal truths for everyone?

April 14

“One act of beneficence, one act of real usefulness, is worth all the abstract sentiment in the world.”

Ann Radcliffe (1762–1823)

Radcliffe’s well-crafted gothic novels lent respectability to the genre. At a time when traditional moralization and superstition were the order of the day, reason drove Radcliffe’s life. Women’s rights would prevail and much that was considered supernatural would be scientifically articulated, but such developments occurred many years after her death. She was a freethinker and a realist before such terms were in vogue. She was inspired by such painters as Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa and, in turn, she inspired such writers as Edgar Allan Poe and the Marquis de Sade. Radcliffe serves as an example of how works and deeds can inspire other great works and deeds.

The mere intention to do a good deed inspires few. Action teaches us integrity as we move step by step from promise to realization, and action inspires others, too. Recovery inspires us to do good—what is good for us and what is good for others. We don’t simply talk about, read about or plan for it.

Like this author, we have lists of those to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. Having been spared from addiction’s finale, we may be tempted to canonize those who helped us. We may get the service bug and welcome more responsibility. We may get preoccupied by the rearview mirror of recovery and want to reify the good old days for generations to come. Noble as our tributes may be, let’s maintain focus on the road ahead. We do our part to ensure the program’s principles are preserved and that the message is attractive and relevant to the next generation who we help to find salvation.

When I *pass it on*, do I honor our founders by practicing what they taught us? Is my gratitude paid forward?

April 15

“A lot of people in the academic world think, ‘No sacred cows.’ We shouldn't sacralize anything. But they sacralize reason itself, as though reason is this noble attribute, reason is our highest nature. And if we could just reason, we will solve our problems. All right, that sounds good on paper. But given all the stuff psychologists have discovered about reason, reasoning is not good at finding the truth. Conscious verbal reasoning is really good at confirming.”

Jonathan Haidt (Born 1963)

Haidt, a political and positive psychologist, wrote *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. Reason has its shortcomings as a prospector for truth. Confirmation bias is a trap we fall into when nursing pet theories. We claim open-mindedness but dwell on facts that favor our biases. The political left gets its information about the right from other leftist members and vice versa. Each side sees themselves as logical and reasonable while the other side is demonized and considered insane. Our side has the one truth and we are virtuous. We decry their position and behavior as dangerous, corrupt and a force that must be stopped by any means. When this polarization happens, our reason will betray us, directing us toward justification, instead of truth and cooperation.

Bill Wilson wrote essays as he formulated the Traditions in the 1940s. They can be found in the pamphlet, “AA Tradition, How it Developed.”²³ He writes about the Pharisee, noted for strict observance of ceremony and rules, self-righteous and with a tendency to be hypocritical. On the other side, the Recalcitrant is resistant to authority, disobedient and hard to manage. In “Concept XII,” Bill states that AA will never govern members or groups (Warranty Six) and that, “No penalties are to be inflicted for nonconformity, no member can be expelled . . . each A.A. group shall conduct its internal affairs as it wishes . . . care will be observed to respect and protect all minorities . . .”

Do I make villains out of others inside or outside of my fellowship? Do I see my way as righteous and others' ways as depraved? Should I walk a mile in another's shoes and try to understand them?

April 16

“Sought through mindful inquiry and meditation to improve our spiritual awareness, seeking only for knowledge of our rightful path in life and the power to carry that out.”

Step Eleven (aaagnostica.org)

No two Hindus, Humanists, Christians, Jews, Buddhists or Atheists have identical spiritual definitions, experiences and practices. Who am I? What am I doing here? Who are these others? This trilogy of spiritual conundrums is as practical as it is philosophical. Mindful inquiry devoted to these three questions is as spiritual as it is material and as obvious as it is unanswerable. Knowledge isn't to comfort our souls; it is to enhance awareness—that's an awakening. Some things have to be *believed* to be *seen*. Feelings articulate truth in ways that our brains cannot. We may have a sense about who we are, what our purpose is and how we relate to the rest of the world even without the vocabulary to articulate it. Recovery is visceral as much as it is intellectual. The Eleventh Step is our spiritual barometer, feeding back sensations, feelings and thoughts as we observe.

Step Eleven isn't just something done simply while kneeling in solitude. Our recovery isn't our “gift” to our family or loved ones; why make virtue out of necessity? Seeing others as individuals and not as spokes branching out from the hub of our ego-centric self helps us to be present, patient and empathetic. Lingering narcissism transforms into self-actualization. When we practice Step Eleven we recognize our potential.

The dark side of self is a self-absorbed, parasitic state, which is manifested in the desperateness of addiction. Early in recovery, friends and members of our communities see us finding our rightful path. We are thoughtful—entertaining hunches without jumping to conclusions. We think before reacting.

Are meditation and mindfulness about finding comfort? Are they about self-awareness?

April 17

“If you have learned how to disagree without being disagreeable, then you have discovered the secret of getting along—whether it be business, family relations, or life itself.”

Bernard Meltzer (1916–1998)

We can agree to disagree. If we are controversial in Step meetings, no one should balk. Being agreeable is not the key to maintaining sobriety. The fighters might have an advantage over the amiable ones in the recovery arena. The pain in the neck—the person who questions, doubts and asks for evidence—isn't fighting sobriety. Rather, he or she is fighting *for* sobriety. We have all seen members who answer any challenge with “Yes, I know,” or “You are probably right,” and “Yes I should,” and then fall off the wagon without warning, eighty meetings into a ninety in ninety regimen. On the other hand, the restless and irritable newcomer whom you expect will never come back, considering the mood they left in, stays clean and the program takes hold. What looks like aversion may just be authenticity.

Being disagreeable out of reflex is cynicism—a barrier to recovery. Treating the Twelve Step fellowship as a popularity contest is dangerous business, too. As the quote above suggests, sticking to our guns and having some tact is the best of both worlds. If our personal bottom line varies from group-think, that might be a concern, but not a deal breaker. This century, methadone and buprenorphine patients are being treated for opiate addiction through harm reduction clinics.²⁴ Disclosing this fact in our abstinence-based Step meetings could be met with unsolicited advice. Evidence suggests that for opiate-dependent patients, prospects for relapse-prevention are much greater with a medically supervised regulation of blood and brain chemistry. There is no shortage of quackery out there but many newcomers are enjoying far more cutting edge treatment than was available when our “traditional wisdom” was forged. Can old-timers be as open-minded as newcomers are asked to be?

Have I exercised my right to work the program based on my beliefs, bottom line and timing?

April 18

“Ego tells us that our defenses will make us feel secure, yet all that results in increased feelings of isolation and fear. It is impossible to feel secure while we are building high walls behind which we hide. Safety and security are by-products of peace of mind. In laying down our defenses and adopting an attitude of acceptance, our world changes.”

Healing the Addictive Mind by
Lee Jampolsky

If we subscribe to the idea that the addict’s brain is wired differently from the *normie’s* brain, we will jump to rash conclusions on a regular basis. Egotism is over-compensation. Behind the bravado and sense of entitlement we fear that we are worthless. We feel ashamed deep down inside. Because we suspect we are unworthy, we feel vulnerable to attack. We protect ourselves by building defenses—humor, pride, delusion and isolation to name a few. If we don’t have bricks for a wall, a smokescreen will make a fine hiding place. If that doesn’t work, there is always perpetual motion to help us steer clear of being discovered or unmasked.

Acceptance is life minus the struggle; we accept ourselves and the world, faults and all. Hey—let’s not forget that we label ourselves and the world as flawed, which might be just how we see it. What if we remove the walls and reveal to others that we feel inadequate and unsure? *Healing the Addictive Mind* contends that, by making peace with our imperfection, we feel *good enough*, which is more spiritually sound than acting perfect. We won’t feel threatened by our vulnerability. In fact, we are candid about it. Saying “I am imperfect and I accept this about me” is more empowering and takes less energy than hiding or overcompensating. Longtime members remember that being a *power of example* is about how we deal with misfortune and imperfection. It isn’t about being flawless and all-knowing.

Am I aware of when I am putting up walls or barriers? If I can’t stop doing it entirely, am I at least taking inventory of what triggers my flight, freeze or fight instincts?

April 19
*“There is always something ridiculous about the emotions of
people whom one has ceased to love.”*
Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

When we hear others talk about their past lives being full of villains who are described as “bitches” or “assholes,” we take what they say with a grain of salt, knowing that each of the demonized characters in these sad stories were once part of a promise of a new day for the narrators. What was “playfulness” can now be re-written as “childishness,” “sexy” can become “slutty” and “proactive” is now “manipulative.” These are all the same characteristics but new, soured opinions can lead us to rewrite the entire history of relationships. We had expectations going into them. Expectations are premeditated resentments.

Identifying rationalization in others is so much easier than taking ownership of our own rationalizations. Blaming others, even those we love or loved, is easy. Maybe that’s why in the early directions for doing a Step Four in Chapter Five of *Alcoholics Anonymous* they played to our natural tendencies. We write down resentments, fears and our sexual conduct, starting with resentments. They flow so easily because we can describe the shortcomings of others with articulate candor. But then we are asked to look back at our lives and review our role in these situations. We look at our insecurities, shame and fear and at how these people triggered us. We see our true nature and patterns, maybe for the first time.

Do I still feel superior to, or victimized by, people and/or life? How can I accept them for who they are (or were) and make peace with the facts and the infinite unknowns of life?

April 20

“One's suffering disappears when one lets oneself go, when one yields—even to sadness.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944)

Labeling our experiences as misfortune triggers suffering. We associate feelings with our experiences. Feeling loss is normal. Expressing feelings doesn't cause suffering either. Fighting or fleeing fear, sadness, grief or anger is what escalates the experience of feeling into unworkable suffering. Avoidance is an old defense for addicts. Maybe in our formative years we had to cope with unstable, non-supportive or hostile environments. Avoidance was the best we could do as children. We had few choices about our environment or our caregivers. We are older now, with more choices, yet we still follow engrained habits of repressing and avoiding undesirable feelings.

Some of us try to intellectualize our emotional pain by labeling and quantifying. Thinking isn't the right tool for the job when it comes to feelings—no matter how smart we are. The only healthy way to manage feelings is to experience them, under safe circumstances that do not cause us or anyone else undue harm. Facing our grief, shame, fear and anger won't overwhelm us. On the contrary, it will heal us if we let our emotions pass through us like waves, waxing and then waning. In the same way we will never start laughing and not be able to stop, feelings run their course. Crying doesn't last forever, nor does anger. We addicts make bogeymen out of uncomfortable feelings when they come our way. Fight or flight instinct doesn't save us. It compounds the problem for another day and it may invite depression or anxiety today. With practice, we gain insight, courage and confidence. Pain becomes our beacon and we move toward it. It's rare that strong feelings last more than a few minutes. If we stay with it we will make it through to the other side. If we run, we run forever.

Pain in life is unavoidable. The next time I feel, can I put out the welcome mat, let go and experience the feeling? If I judge feelings, that's me doing the judging and I can stop if I want to.

April 21

"Forgiveness is giving up the hope that the past could have been any different."

Oprah Winfrey (born 1954)

In the rooms we hear, "Live and let live" or "Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself." Even universal truths have an exception or two. The deeper recovery gets, the more binary thinking gives way to pluralism. Our internal, existential lives are rarely made up of absolutes, of rights and wrongs so clearly defined in black and white. We have a range of feelings and it is folly to deny any of them. There is healing power in justice as there is in reconciliation but we might not be clear or consistent in what we want or how we feel. Obligatory forgiveness as part of the therapeutic process is anything but freeing. Sexual abuse victims, for instance, may feel empowered to be given permission to never forgive. For some of us, certain violations are unforgivable. The appeal of forgiveness is that with it, the victim regains control: "I decide if and when you are forgiven. I have the power, not you."

We look at each deed from many vantage points—as many as we can. We may feel an act was malicious and intentional. The offender may feel falsely accused or justified. To them, nothing inappropriate occurred and no contract was either entered into or broken. We may resist moving beyond our victimhood, which we may use to define ourselves. Conversely, we may rush to forgiveness as a seemingly noble or mature gesture. We may use what psychologists call "causal attribution": "Hurt people hurt people." We don't take the inevitable act personally. Turning the other cheek could be a reflexive, avoidant coping technique. One might hear at a meeting that there are steps to forgiveness. In a criminal proceeding the pardon doesn't come first; first there is the trial, then there is the sentencing, later comes the pardon.

Forgiving myself and others is a complex matter. Will I honor my pain by feeling my pain? Will I look at the deed, the perpetrator and their circumstances? Is my perpetrator a victim as well? Do I have to forgive to heal? Does the perpetrator have to admit fault to be forgiven?

April 22

“The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones.”

John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946)

By August 2012, over 31 million copies of *Alcoholics Anonymous* had been circulated and the Big Book had been recognized as one of the most influential books to shape American culture.²⁵ The first 164 pages have been preserved, as is, despite the fact that we knew so much more about alcoholism and recovery in the years of later editions—1955, 1976 and 2001. “We realize we know only a little,” concludes the final chapter of the Big Book, “A Vision for You.” The founders’ humility is ignored by followers who have chosen instead to make the text sacred. Dogma ends the discussion, forfeiting the input of the next generation. Instead of treating the text as anecdotal experiences we treat it as though it has been divinely inspired. We can see why this reverence appears cult-like to on-lookers.

If Bob and Bill were Buddhists who met in the 1930s, halfway around the world, they would likely have come up with an equally effective answer to alcoholism, although written in quite a different voice. Bill’s favorite number might have been eight, not twelve. His approach may have been based on noble truths instead of Christian tenets. The program would work. It would be somewhat different. Stewards of our program may have still canonized founders and reified the message. Once we deem a passage sacred we are blind to new evidence or more contemporary ways of expressing the kernels of truth in the message. The Twelve Steps, as expressed in 1939, are the medium, not the message. The message is the life-restoring force of those words, which can be articulated in many thoughtful ways.

Do I honor the wisdom of our founders without being rigid about the message? Is it the principles or verbatim text that holds the secret of my recovery? Am I firm on principle and flexible on method?

April 23

“Every one of us is sort of a figment of our own imaginations.”

Kris Kristofferson (born June 1936)

Yesterday we imagined what the differences and similarities of our movement would have been by altering geographic or historical facts. Kristofferson reminds us, in “The Pilgrim, Chapter 33,” that how we see ourselves and our world is “partly truth and partly fiction.” Individually, the inventory process keeps us aware of the space between who we are and how we perceive ourselves. This is a worthwhile exercise to practice when considering our collective history, too.

Today we will look at Big Book mythology—the space between what the founders were saying and the figments of our imagination that we call the message. What would AA founders have to say to zealots today who decry, “There is ‘A’ solution—not multiple choices, and if you want freedom from this merciless obsession you must follow these instructions, exactly as laid out, exactly as each of the first one hundred members did”? How comical to imagine one hundred gathered together as one saying, “The third thing I did was to abandon dependence on self-will, then I did an inventory, making a list of three things—resentments, fears and sex conduct.” Then a chorus starts around the room, “Me too,” “Wow, same with me, and then I admitted to God, myself and another human being, the exact nature of my wrongs.” “Really, so did I.” “Me too,” “Me too,” “Same here, except at some of these I balked, I thought I could find an easier softer way.” “OMG, so did I, so did I!” etc.

I know that not one of the founders did the steps exactly this way, in this exact order. These were general ideas explored in a general way. Do I ever get carried away with Twelve Step lore? Do I remember that my history and the history of my fellowship is a perception—“partly truth and partly fiction”?

April 24

“I know of no society in human history that ever suffered because its people became too desirous of evidence in support of their core beliefs.”

Sam Harris (born 1967)

The Twelve Step community is a society. Our fellowship offers an empowering freedom in that we are encouraged to accept what we want, dismiss what we want and explore what works. Our whole culture was borne of challenging core beliefs and if we hadn't, we would all be members of the Oxford Group.

Founders took what they liked from the Oxford Group's core beliefs and the psychology of the day, purging dogmatic beliefs and practices that couldn't be supported by evidence. The Four Absolutes of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love were great principles but the absolute expectation was discouraging and they were replaced by the notion of “progress, not perfection.” Early drafts from our recently recovered founders put our own core beliefs up for scrutiny. The Big Book originally included more rigid “you must” statements than we see today. Both our professional friends of the day and our early membership didn't have evidence that a list of rules and barking orders was the best ways to appeal to drunks. Many *musts* were replaced with suggestions. Buddhist AA members who didn't share the Western belief in God adapted the Steps to work without God—and this won the blessings of AA.²⁶

Fellowships that followed have adapted again, looking at evidence from their experiences to dictate what to keep and what to let go of. Along with a theistic view of Higher Power, new fellowships removed the patriarchal bias of the original literature and other antiquated language.

The inventory process forces me to challenge my core beliefs. Am I still rigorous about continuing to challenge my beliefs when I do my daily inventory?

April 25

“In our country we are pretty good at responding to crisis. We are not very good at avoiding it.”

Albert A. Bartlett (born 1923)

As addicts we know all about this. No matter how much worse life got when we were using, we lowered our expectations instead of curing the problem. We could have quit, we could have avoided hurting ourselves and hurting others, but we kept spiraling down, into rationalization and cognitive dissonance.

Media, government and the stock market prefer to respond to symptoms rather than to confront the cause. Today's author, a physics professor, applies arithmetic to the contradiction of sustainable growth and he tries to impress on students that modest growth of 5% per annum will turn every billion people into eight billion within fifty years. How is that sustainable? Environmental decline, peak oil and peak everything are examples of how people in the plural are even more disinclined to face the truth than people in the singular.

James Joyce wrote in the early twentieth century, “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” What Joyce was sharing with addicts like us is that history will be a nightmare today if we are repeating the mistakes of our past. To be trapped in monotony is a nightmare. Even if we are fully cognizant of our misdeeds, we will repeat the cycle if we don't awaken from the denial about the futility of the paths we trudge.

In our hearts, we know when we are being self-destructive. The nightmare is the repetitive history of our addictive cycles. In despair, we find the support of others and we feel a glimmer of hope that the cycle will end. We can avoid the tragic end of untreated addiction. Instead of reconciling ourselves to crisis management, we take steps to arrest our addictions. We begin to see our own potential.

Integrity is one of the byproducts of living well. Free from the enslavement of insatiable needs we begin looking after ourselves, contributing to family and community and becoming mindful and responsible stewards of planet earth.

Do I still live in the nightmare of repetitive cycles? How do I now avoid hardship which I used to grin and bear? Do I endure consequences that I can avoid?

April 26

“When we take the actions to complete one vision, another one may emerge. For instance, our original vision of being solvent may expand to include returning to school, opening our own business, going abroad, etc.”

“Visions,” Debtors Anonymous

It is sometimes said in the rooms that “if I made a wish-list when I got here, I would have sold myself short.” We come to recovery reluctantly. We might expect no more than a life of white-knuckled sobriety. We see only two limited choices once we accept being defeated by addiction: the purgatory of recovery or continuing down a dead-end path of escalating addiction all the way to hell.

Changing our attitudes in recovery is two-fold. On one hand, we may find we are unlocking a Pandora’s Box of personal issues that reach greater depths than we could have foreseen through the foggy, reactive state we arrived in. We may have more work than we first bargained for and our bottom line behaviors are likely going to be adjusted as our minds and our expectations unclog.

But on the other hand, our new lifestyles, which we expected to be big limitations, opened doors for us and we often see these new opportunities as being beyond our hopes or imaginations.

Material possessions may be unexpected benefits. New attitudes and outlooks may emerge. We have new values that guide us. Our hindered feelings of self-worth begin to blossom. Creativity that we didn’t know we had is likely to surprise us.

How is life today, compared to what I expected? How have my goals and values changed since I started my recovery?

April 27

“Everything that Hitler did was ‘legal.’ It was ‘illegal’ to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany. But I am sure that if I had lived in Germany during that time I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers even though it was illegal.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. (19289–1968)

One day doing the right thing will make us unpopular and put us at risk of being judged or persecuted. So much of our new lives involve getting along, going with the flow, improving ourselves, focusing on what’s wrong on our side of the street and accepting the rest. Is there ever a time to be the vigilante or defy an unjust law or speak out about harassment or discrimination? Absolutely—what’s the point of finding our values if we aren’t willing to put them on the line? That said, those of us who have been around for a few twenty-four hours have been on at least one crusade of self-will that we had mistaken for a mission from God. When we look back on it now, we find it laughable that we thought we found the universe no longer unfolding as it should and ourselves being charged with righting this wrong.

The THINK test looks at five caveats: Is it True and am I being Honest? Is it Important, Necessary and Kind? Sometimes we hear something we are predisposed to believe. Let’s do our research and be sure what we put our necks out for is true. Rigorous honesty demands the question “Is my ego/pride on the line?” Narcissism can be lurking behind feigned altruism. How important is this? If this is a turning point in history, how will our children and grandchildren view our involvement in this cause? A good night’s sleep can help evaluate each situation’s relevance. Is it necessary? Even when we are right about something, do we have to be publicly vindicated? A bad loser is one thing but a self-righteous winner is hard to take. A pause for thought can stop us from gloating. Fantasies of vindication have to be curbed before we pull the trigger on *inflicting* justice. "Is it kind?" reminds us that, when it comes to the truth, few things are black and white. More important than being right is doing the right thing.

If I stand to be counted, am I doing it with humility and compassion?

April 28

“The writer operates at a peculiar crossroads where time and place and eternity somehow meet.

His problem is to find that location.”

Flannery O’Connor (1925–1964)

Creativity can seem elusive; it doesn’t come when we summon it. We cannot simply set a GPS to the creativity crossroads. Like the writing greats, we put pen to paper (or characters on a screen) to help us find what we are searching for. We journal, we write inventories, and maybe we write poems or songs, as well. For much of our lives we have been like screenwriters, crafting scripts and roles of whom we should be. We each cast ourselves as the story’s hero. When the world we lived in became unbearable, we rewrote our scripts, recasting new co-stars and scouting out new geographical settings.

The same creative skills we employed to deny and delude can help us find our way back to reality, too. The Twelve Steps have writing exercises built right in to help us face the facts. Journaling can become part of the meditation and reflection process, or it may simply be a way to filter the useless crap out of our heads. Ruminating and regretting can be purged onto the paper or screen so we can get on with the day, less encumbered.

Even doodling can be like meditative breathing, scribbling as we negotiate through our *mind-field*. Searching our hearts can be like an emotional minefield. We tread lightly, afraid of tripping up a memory or repressed feeling that might blow up in our face. Sometimes we are afraid for good reason. Other times we are anxious, merely suffering from fear of the unknown. Writing can be a way of discovering. It can also help defuse potentially explosive memories or feelings that we might disturb along the way. Seeking is a commitment, not a prison sentence—we come and go as we please.

Am I a writer? Do I use my creative power to escape, create or discover?

April 29
"I'd rather step on your toes than walk on your grave."
Heard around the rooms

This is an old-school card used to trump *Live and Let Live*. Sometimes kindness kills. Late last century, formal, guided interventions became popular for the first time. Staged by families and a professional, addicts/alcoholics got an unexpected emotional shock treatment. Everyone was prepared to rub the subject the wrong way, getting in their face with (a) how much it hurt to see them self-destruct (how much they were loved) and (b) what the ultimatum would be, should the targeted problem-case not go to treatment. Was this conditional love or tough love?

These organized interventions were facilitated by a *treatment professional* whose two-year community college certificate and finder's fee from the treatment center raised questions from critics. But this professional assured the family that "interventions save lives." She or he went on to assure the addict or alcoholic that everyone gathered together loved them and, consequently, would not sit quietly by and let them die.

There are successful interventions that have saved lives. In early AA, taking each other's inventory was called "telling a drunk how it is." There were a lot of rocks thrown by a lot of glass house renters but unsolicited advice came free with membership back in the day. It's not as if this style of sponsorship is unheard of now. Some of the targets of interventions left in disgust, calling it interference. Others got the wakeup call they needed. Some of us are not cut out for confrontational sponsorship and some of us get a rush out of it.

Do I remember that I am no expert and nobody's keeper? Would I speak out if I thought it would help someone? How do I feel when someone is cruel to be kind with me or offers a "loving appraisal?"

April 30

“Help people reach their full potential—catch them doing something right.”

The One Minute Manager by

Kenneth Blanchard, PhD, Spencer Johnson, M.D.

Be a rebel. If pointing out the failings of others is the norm, we can choose to be different. We can ignore shortcomings, smile through mishaps and not raise our voices until friends or children around us get it right. None of us are motivated by the reverse of an idea. “Don’t do _____ that way!” This only lowers someone’s self-image without improving their performance. Somehow, our brains don’t remember the little words like “never” and “don’t,” just the dramatic words said with passion, like “you idiot,” “failure” and “wrong.” In fact, maybe we don’t remember the words at all—we might just remember how we felt after hearing them. If our mistakes inspire the day’s most enthusiastic outpouring from onlookers, then that negative behavior gets locked into the memory.

Who works best when they are tense and who works best relaxed? Stop a kid in his or her tracks, point a finger, and say, “Don’t think I didn’t see you put your dishes away. Do you have any idea how proud I feel when I see you being responsible? Do you? Just let me catch you getting it right again and you’ll get another ear full. Do you hear me?” Are we not happier ourselves, when we catch people doing something right?

We can try it for just one day. We bite our tongues when we would usually criticize and we express ourselves when we are impressed, proud or happy as a result of the actions of others. This exercise may make us feel great. When we are focused on the good things going on it affects how we feel. Also, the way people will warm to us when we are considerate of others, will improve how we feel about ourselves. “Instant Karma’s going to get you!” as John Lennon would say.

Can I try pointing out the good in others, just for today?

May 1
“Religion without science is blind and science without religion is lame.”
Albert Einstein (1879–1955)

Albert Einstein grew uncomfortable with the Jewish dogma with which he was raised, such as the idea that they were the chosen people of God: “For me the Jewish religion like all others is an incarnation of the most childish superstitions. And the Jewish people to whom I gladly belong and with whose mentality I have a deep affinity have no different quality for me than all other people.”

Einstein is known the world round as a man of science, with an affinity for the known, quantifiable, material world. But even as he worshipped science, he never discounted the mystery and relevance of the unknown and the immeasurable. Einstein mastered the material world but was never threatened by, in denial of or at odds with the mystical unknown. Our program teaches us the humility we need to not be at odds with our fellows. We tolerate, or, where we can, we embrace perspectives that are contrary to our own. We are comfortable with our beliefs but we don’t present them as the be-all and end-all because we see no need for permanent attachment to them. Where surrounding ourselves with like-minded people provides a comfortable confirmation of our biases, enlightenment and new awakening can only come from contrary stimulation. Great scientists invite the prospect of being proven wrong. It is science, not their pet theories, which they revere.

Do I get defensive in the presence of opposing views or can I learn from everyone? If I can only learn from people who believe and think as I do, how open will I be to a world of possibilities? I never know when I am judging someone who will one day be my unlikely teacher.

May 2

“When you find peace within yourself, you become the kind of person who can live at peace with others.”

Mildred Lisette Norman (1908–1981)

The words of “Peace Pilgrim,” an anti-war activist most of her adult life, have special meaning for us in recovery. There is a time in our recovery to be rigorous, thorough and vigilant. Reversing the self-destructive ways we learned as addicts required relentless effort. But what is gained and what is lost when we are so hard on ourselves? Being hard on ourselves makes it difficult to escape being hard on those around us. A critical double-edged sword cuts both ways. There comes a time to be more gentle.

Letting go is most often associated with shedding surface worries, fears and tensions. But letting go can be letting that which is repressed come up to the surface. Think of the tension we can release if we have nothing to hide, no shame, no fear that we are avoiding. In letting things go in this way we feel no need to overcompensate. Authenticity brings peace with self and we naturally make peace with our surroundings, too.

Think of the people in our circle—who is easy-going with those around them and who is more critical? With few exceptions, those who give themselves a break can easily find understanding for others. As for those who look for fault like there’s a reward for it, chances are they are projecting how hyper-critical they are of themselves. Let’s learn to make peace with ourselves. Those around us will be better off and they deserve a break today.

Today, can I commit to being more at peace, knowing I am just fine the way I am? So are those around me. With whom can I make an extra effort to be peaceful with today?

May 3

“The moment we decide to stop and look at what is going on (like a swimmer suddenly changing course to swim upstream instead of downstream), we find ourselves battered by powerful currents we had never even suspected—precisely because until that moment we were largely living at their command.”

Stephen Batchelor (born 1953)

Today’s author illustrates why we often hear, “Stopping is easy, I quit all the time. Staying stopped—can’t seem to do that.” Like the swimmer, we were enslaved by environmental forces. We thought we were in control because our arms and legs were moving. But when we stopped and went against the current we could see that we had previously been pulled along by more than our will. Going up against addiction seemed insurmountable. The shock of struggling against the current motivated us to seek power beyond our resources to counter the overwhelming pressure. We needed help. No matter what we conceive this power to be, we don’t passively “get saved.” Step Three is like pushing upstream, tired, uncertain, but with faith that the strength we need will be there. We see others who have done it. This power of example gets us through those moments when we think, “I can’t make it.”

Later, in Steps Six and Seven, we again find the same dilemma of uncertainty. In taking inventory, we identify rationalizations, habits, deeds and excuses that don’t really fit our value systems. Now, with willingness, humility and effort, we try right-living on for size. New behaviors and new thinking help us develop new swimming muscles to resist the current all over again. We are reminded that “going with the flow” isn’t always living rightly.

In sobriety, do I go with the flow or fight the current? Do I recognize that, like learning to swim, working the Steps takes time and discipline as I gradually develop new muscles?

May 4

*“We realized that resources were available to help us win our freedom,
if we were willing to use them.”*

*Step Two, The Pagan (Nine) Steps
nigesteppagans.faithweb.com*

The addictive or dysfunctional mind has a defiant edge that *protects* our illness from the force of reason or love. Twelve Step recovery doesn't work *on* us, but it can work *for* us, if we make a commitment. Generally, others saw we needed help before we did. In the denial of addiction how did we respond to loving intervention or criticism of any kind? We isolated ourselves from loved ones, institutions or movements that suggested that we had a problem. Or we were defeatist, saying, “What's the use?” Many play both sides of the fence, declaring we are fine and don't need help on one hand and then that we are victims of circumstances on the other hand. “I am not an alcoholic,” one stubborn drunk insists, “I am a heavy social drinker with bad luck.”

In the addiction world, many of us die in defiance rather than recover. For those of us who recover and prosper, admitting and accepting we need help is a key to the Second Step. Facing the fact that we do not have the means to combat the *merciless obsession* solely on our own, we now (i) consider that maybe we don't have all the answers and we aren't all powerful; (ii) have the vulnerability to welcome the love, experience and guidance of others (letting other people love us takes a surprising amount of effort); and (iii) take the plunge, or immerse ourselves in the recovery community. Changing our scenery and influences goes a long way toward changing our attitudes.

Have I learned to let other people love me? Can I call people or ask for help? If I am reluctant, what is that about? Is it pride, shyness, procrastination or something else? Real change requires willingness and effort. Once the effort is made, it won't feel uncomfortable for long.

May 5

“The terms spiritual experience and spiritual awakening are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, Appendix II, 569

Who hasn't heard that “our program is an adjustable wrench that can work on any nut”? Regardless of our beliefs, practices or culture, addiction shows little bias. It's widely agreed that addiction affects our minds, our bodies and spirits. Recovery *by The Book* is also three-fold—mental, physical and spiritual. It doesn't matter whether we are deeply religious or secular. We might believe we have an addiction or disease or just an obsession, habit or a craving. We might think we're possessed by an evil spirit. For some of us, “spiritual” describes a connectedness to a higher or inner power. For others, “spiritual” is a catch-all phrase to describe abstract or intuitive aspects of recovery that are neither mental nor physical.

Our opening position is willingness; an understanding comes later. No two people have identical experiences with either addiction or recovery. The Steps almost always affect us differently than we expected. Our thoughts and attitudes will be challenged along the way and we welcome these challenges. Addiction flourishes in closed-mindedness. In recovery we expect that our beliefs, preferences and attitudes will change. When faced with something that doesn't make sense to us, do we consider our ways of seeing as dynamic and likely to change ten years from now?

Today, in my own words, how do I describe addiction and the recovery process? Does the idea of a threefold recovery—physical, mental and spiritual—fit with my beliefs? Do I respect matters of both the physical and metaphysical world?

May 6

“In blindly pursuing progress, our civilization has, in effect, institutionalized frustration. For in seeking to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative, we have forgotten entirely that the positive is defined only in terms of the negative. The opposites might indeed be as different as night and day, but the essential point is that without night we would not even be able to recognize something called day.”

Ken Wilber (born 1949)

If we were to take the Twelve Steps literally we would expect each of us to look like a slice of Swiss cheese—our character defects would be removed and nothing would remain but the yummy us. In *No Boundaries*, Wilber looks at our tendency to define ourselves by the boundaries we create between us and others, us and our things, and even us and our own bodies. Our boundaries aren't just between us and the outside world. We draw lines between our good sides and our shadow selves, too. Our self-worth is defined by our progress: “I am not the person I use to be,” “That's not like me,” etc. Greed and manipulation may be part of the dark sides of our personalities that will continue to act up while we strive for more righteous values. This frustrates us but that's what daily inventory is for.

This is a time for examination, not condemnation. Why are we acting or feeling this way? Greed might signal a feeling of lacking. If we find ourselves manipulating, do we feel oppressed or out of control? These feelings may be accurate assessments and they may be way off. The goal is to keep searching, to understand more. With understanding, we can act more consciously and less reactively—if we can cut ourselves some slack. In western culture, never being satisfied is encouraged. Even in our meetings we can be pretty hard on ourselves and receive nothing but understanding nods in response.

Do I subscribe to the “accentuate the positive/eliminate the negative” program? If that's frustrating me, why stay with a program that isn't working? Can I steal a page from the Jungian play book, borrowed from Eastern philosophy, which encourages integrating the yin and the yang?

May 7

“You feel strong and weak at the same time. You feel excited and at the same time, terrified. The truth is you don’t know the way you feel, except you know the kind of man you want to be. It’s as if you’ve reached the unreachable and you weren’t ready for it.”

Peter Parker, Spider-Man (2002)

If only all spiritual guidance could come from comic book heroes or their alter egos. Clues to right living can come from almost anywhere, even the most commercial of art forms. We take our inspiration where we can get it. In this instance, Peter Parker is talking. Spider-Man is the alter ego who enjoys unwavering confidence, not Parker. We admire the superhero and identify with the more human persona of Peter, who questions what’s right and wrong and whose indecisiveness means he never gets the girl. Peter Parker is nothing if not ambivalent.

Dr. Patrick Carnes, who authored such books as *Don’t Call it Love*, *Out of the Shadows* and *The Gentle Path Through the Twelve Steps*, has been heard in seminars likening recovery to the plight of the hobbit from *The Lord of The Rings*, Frodo Baggins: “I take the ring though I know not the way.” Both Frodo and Peter Parker are reluctant messiahs—they never asked for their lots in life, but they accept responsibility. They’ll figure it out along the way. Didn’t Peter Parker’s uncle tell him, “With great power, comes great responsibility”? Every life has great power; Uncle Ben’s message is for all of us.

Do I take responsibility—for myself and others in whose lives I play a role? Can I accept responsibility without reservation or recognition? If I have doubt, can I press on, one day at a time?

May 8

“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.”

Thomas Edison (1847–1931)

It sounds irrational, but think about it: what if mistakes were good? We would never have to lie about one again. They would not cause us shame or doubt. We wouldn't have fear about erring today or later this year. No longer would we be critical of others who make mistakes—not our kids, our parents or our friends. If mistakes weren't wrong, we wouldn't give up. If we think about it for a while, this simple way of seeing changes everything.

Edison was working for Westinghouse and had not yet invented the incandescent light bulb when interviewed by a young reporter who asked him how it felt to try variations of an experiment 10,000 times and have nothing but failure to show for it. Edison said, “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.” It may have taken this stubborn man another 4,000 tries, but he did invent the light bulb.

Think for a moment—what are the biggest mistakes we have ever made in our lives? OK, now take time to consider what we learned from them. Did our ways of seeing get altered for the better because of what each mistake taught us?

Can I think of the smallest or most recent mistakes I made? Did getting it wrong mean the end of the world? Was I embarrassed? Have I or do I expect that I will learn something from the results that followed my effort? Could I rethink the automatic reflex that pours regret on my mistakes? I can if I want to. Thomas Edison said so. I say so, too.

May 9

“Until you value yourself, you won't value your time. Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it.”

M. Scott Peck (1936–2005)

Self-worth wanes and shame remains when we fall short of our values—or are they someone else's values? When we say “I should” it is worth exploring whose values we are measuring ourselves by. *shoulds* that we live with or claim to live with might be consolations for not knowing what we stand for. Do we feel we have a right to our own values? That's what a healthy self-image is about. Finding our true values makes living by them easier than seeking approval or sucking up to someone else's standards. How does one muster the integrity to live up to someone else's values? We were people-pleasing, hoping that the approval of others would rub off in terms of how we felt. Some of us resent having others' expectations imposed on us. “You're not the boss of me!” was our childish knee-jerk reaction.

When other people's needs come before our own, we don't value our time in the way that we do when we feel equal to others. We give ourselves away and have little to show for it. We may resent others or fall into a passive-aggressive trap and find ourselves being snappy or feeling hurt.

Time is one area we can take responsibility for, right now. We get some important benefits from respecting time. Time, like money, can seem scarce. Too much time on our hands can spook us; we run around creating drama to avoid spare time. Our attitudes about time teach us a lot about our core beliefs. Peck talks about valuing ourselves first and then respecting our time. We have found that we can act our way into good thinking at least as well as we can think our way into good acting. Respecting our time and others' time will make us feel differently about ourselves. It also sets the tone for how others treat us.

What am I prepared to say “no” to? What am I going to show up for? Showing up for myself (emotionally) is part of self-care or what Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA) oriented therapy calls self-parenting.

May 10

*“Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message
to other codependents who still suffer.”*

coda.org.

Bill Wilson said we should rejoice in the fact that drunks are getting sober any way at all. George Vaillant, a Harvard doctor, joined AA as a non-alcoholic Trustee in 1998 and estimated that 40% of sober people are so because of AA.²⁷ AA is not everything to everyone, which means that it doesn't profess to have found a cure for every problem or even the one and only solution for alcoholics. AA is for people who want to stop drinking, but can't on their own. Understanding the limitations of our recovery programs can keep us from developing unreasonable expectations. People are at liberty to take or leave our help. We don't know what is best for people. Tradition Five helps us, the newcomer and the public stay clear on what the fellowship has to offer.

A diverse membership improves the odds that the newcomer can relate to and/or be inspired by someone. It also gives us all a greater tapestry of experience and perspective to draw upon. Looking around at our home groups, do we see that they reflect the general population just outside our doors? What might there be about our groups that frustrates carrying the message to sufferers? Habits and rituals may make one group feel welcoming and comfortable while different habits and rituals may make another group feel uncomfortable. If our population doesn't accurately reflect our community, is there more our groups could do to adapt to gender, racial and cultural differences? Our primary purpose is to make all who suffer feel welcome. We feel welcome and comfortable at our meetings. Is there anything we do that would discourage potential members from other cultural backgrounds?

How is a primary purpose different from a single purpose? Do I follow the crowd or take the lead in tabling ideas to make my group better for everyone?

May 11

“Using reality as your higher power, you will have to bend the steps from their current and now canonical wording. You can't pray to reality, but you can form and express your intention to live by its rules. And you can meditate in order to cultivate mindfulness of what's real. This won't necessarily please all those orthodox 12 Steppers, but then it's unrealistic to expect literalists to be open-minded. And getting real is the whole idea here.”

Thailo, An Atheist's Guide to Twelve-Step Recovery

The blog *An Atheist's Guide to Twelve-Step Recovery from Substance Addiction* relates to the doubters' conundrum of finding a workable secular interpretation of the classic Twelve Steps.²⁸ Yesterday's discussion talked about our primary purpose of carrying the message. The message is always that each person can find his or her own salvation, without having to subscribe to set ideas about salvation. Part of carrying the message is to further widen the gateway.

What *we* know to be true is just *opinion* to another. Many of us rely on our thinking skills to make sense of the world. We find evidence to corroborate our hypotheses. In other areas, we may feel strongly about issues without having the facts, and with the support of intuition we have the same conviction as someone with the soundest arguments. It only stands to reason that in meetings, at work, at home and at play we won't always agree with others. How do we get along? How do we relate?

Practicing love and tolerance involves more than putting up with others; it requires a sincere desire to understand, respect and empathize. Attitude is felt by others and is hard to hide from them. No matter how sincerely we frame our words, even a child can hear through a condescending attitude.

Do I consciously nurture an attitude of tolerance and love? When I reach out to help another am I mindful to help them find their own salvation, not *the* salvation? Is reality a power or principle that I can build sane, healthy recovery around? Is living in accordance with reality a goal of mine?

May 12

“A man must make up his mind to do everything in his power to cooperate in such work as there is to be done. Halfway measures are of no avail. Even if the patient is interviewed every day, it is obvious that one hour of instruction, analysis and persuasion could not be effective should a man have an adverse or indifferent state of mind during the other twenty-three.”

The Common Sense of Drinking by
Richard R. Peabody (1892–1936)

“Half measures are of no avail” was one of many ideas Bill (and Bob) adopted from the 1931 book, *The Common Sense of Drinking* by alcoholic and alcohol treatment facilitator R. Peabody. He was the first quasi-professional to promote the idea of alcoholism as an incurable disease. Peabody lost his family and fortune to drinking, and found himself at the psychologically-based healing center of the Emmanuel Movement in Boston. He would later council chronic upscale alcoholics in New York with the secular system of recovery outlined in his best-selling book.

Down the road, the Oxford Group was sobering up Ebby Thacher at this time in history. Bellevue Hospital in NYC and other facilities in Boston and Philadelphia adopted the Peabody method, while Bill and Lois Wilson read it with interest, as did many of the original members. Raymond G. McCarthy, a Peabody-trained therapist, started The Yale Center of Alcohol Studies in 1944, and it was the first free clinic devoted solely to treating alcoholism. Followers continued his work until the 1950s.

Some AAs said Peabody died intoxicated. The medical report said heart failure. Was there a rift over the religious/spiritual factions of recovery that disapproved of his secular approach? Come to think of it, is there still some tribal rivalry inside our culture now? One thing that is for sure is that Peabody’s work, book and experiences are still heard in modern attitudes about addiction and recovery.

Do I keep in mind that many contributors had a hand in Twelve Step philosophy, practices and creed? How much impact does the idea that “halfway measures are of no avail” impact my beliefs now?

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 Powerlessness.....Feb. 8, 16, March 26, May 24, 26, June 17, 22, Aug. 15, 16, 19, Sept. 24,
 26, Nov. 18, 28, Dec. 17, 25, 29
 Prayer.....March 13, 21, May 11, May 15, July 21, 25, 30, Aug. 25, 27, Oct. 5, Nov.
 7
 Prejudice.....May 29, July 12, Oct. 1, Dec. 26
 Procrastination.....Jan. 20, 26, March 20, May 4, 20, June 27, July 16, Aug. 17, Oct. 5, Nov.
 25, Dec. 2
 Proselytizing/preaching.....Feb. 26, 27, March 22, May 31, June 13, Aug. 22, 25, 28, Nov. 10, Dec.
 18

Quitting/relapse.....Feb. 12, 27, March 6, 23, April 17, May 13, 20, June 21, July 18, 23, 28,
 Aug. 3, 7, 15, Nov. 17, Dec. 15, 21
 Rationalization.....April 2, 5, 19, 25, May 3, 17, 28, July 18, 23, 28, Aug. 16, Sept. 14, Oct.
 16, Nov. 18, Dec. 21
 Reason/skepticism.....Feb. 4, 26, March 1, 16, 22, 23, April 2, 11, 14,15, May 24, July 18, Aug.
 21, Sept. 17, 18, Oct. 13, Dec. 26
 Relationship.....Feb. 3, 5, 9, 22, March 15, 29, April 9, 29, June, 5, 6, 20, 24, July 15, 29,
 30, Aug. 4, 20, 22, Sept. 3, 6, 9, 14, Oct. 6, 18, 29
 Relaxation/rest.....Feb. 25, June 30, July 8, Aug. 8, Nov. 1, 26
 Repressed feelings.....Jan. 6, 19, Feb. 5, April 1, 28, May 2, 28, June 27, July 4, Sept. 14, 15, 26
 Responsibility.....Jan. 2, 14, 16, 27, Feb. 8, 9, 14, March 15,18, April 5, 8, 14, May 7, 9, 14,
 28,June 4, 7, 10, 14, Aug. 13, Sept. 5, 8, 13, 14, 20, 25, Oct. 19, Nov. 4, 12,
 Dec. 4, 28, 31
 Rigidity/reification.....Jan. 24, Feb. 7, March 21, April 4, June 12, 22, Oct. 1, 20, Nov. 22, Dec.
 17, 31
 Risk-aversion.....Jan. 18, 26, 29, March 31, April 4, 17, June 14, 19, Aug. 21
 Role-play.....Feb. 18, 19, 20, 21, Aug. 24, Sept. 24, Oct. 13, 14, 15
 Routine.....Jan. 22, Feb. 2, 7, June 12, 27, July 8, 25, Sept. 8, 11, Nov. 15, 19, Dec. 3,
 6, 17
 Sanity/right-mindedness.....Jan. 14, 21, March 1, 17, 20, Aug. 9, 11, 20, 30, Sept. 16, 27, Nov. 5, Dec.
 13, 25
 Self-acceptance/awareness.....Jan. 25, 29, March 20, April 5, 18, July 16, 21, 28, 29, 30, Aug. 7, 29,
 Sept. 1, 8, Oct. 17, 30
 Self-compassion/care.....Feb. 6, April 4, May 9, June 29, July 24, Sept. 14, Oct. 6, 15, Nov. 16
 Self-control/discipline.....Jan. 14, May 3, 21, July 6, Oct. 2, 4, Nov. 1 Dec. 24
 Self-criticism.....Jan. 1, April 15, May 2, 30, Aug. 11, Sept. 23, Oct. 13, 15, 24
 Self-deception.....Jan. 14, Feb. 9, March 5, 11, 27, April 1, 25, May 14, 25, Dec. 7
 Self-esteem.....March 9, May 9, June 27, July 3, 28, Aug. 18, Nov. 2, 20, Sept. 21, 23,
 Nov. 2, Dec. 6
 Self-imposed limitsJan. 23, April 17, 26, May 16, June 24, July 18, Aug. 6, 16, 17, Sept. 4,
 Oct. 24
 Self-pity.....Jan. 15, Feb. 29, May 26, Aug. 5, 17, 24, Oct. 5, 29, Nov. 29
 Self-will.....Jan. 25, Feb. 8, April 23, 27, May 21, June 13, July 6, Sept. 20, 27, 30,
 Oct. 28, 30, Dec. 13, 27
 Service.....Jan. 11, Feb. 12, 19, April 12, 14, June 19, 25, 28, Aug. 13, Nov.12, Dec. 1
 Sex & Love Addiction.....Jan. 2, 30, March 9, 11, April 4, May 24, June 19, July 29, Aug. 4, 22,
 Sept. 3, Oct. 2, 12, Nov. 11, 14, 21, Dec. 15, 19
 Shame.....Jan. 17, 19, 29, March 3, 18, April 8, 18, May 2, 9, 16, 28, June 6, 20, July
 3, 4, 7, 16, 18, 20, Aug. 15, 16, 30, Sept. 13, 23, 30, Oct. 12, 16, 17, Nov. 3,
 19, Dec. 4, 16, 27, 28
 Sharing.....Jan. 8, April 21, May 6, 10, June 14, 21, 26, July 2, 6, 11, 29, Aug. 16, 21,
 Sept. 5, 7, Oct. 26
 Skepticism.....see reason
 Slips.....see relapse
 Solitude.....see isolation
 Spiritual experience/seeking.....Jan. 13, Feb. 12, 24, March 9, 22, April 2, May 1, 5, June 12, 14, 17, Aug.
 27, Sept. 28, Dec. 14, 27
 Sponsorship.....Jan. 3, Feb. 3, 5, 22, March 15, April 29, June 20, 24, Aug. 20, Sept. 9,

Oct. 18, Dec. 13, 18

Statistics.....Feb. 6, 11, April 22, 25, June 24, July 17, Sept. 2, Nov. 3

Step One.....Jan. 4, Feb. 8, 16, 27, April 8, May 26, July 19, Aug. 17, 19, Sept. 20, 24, 26, Nov. 24, Dec. 26

Step Two.....Jan. 12, 13, 25, Feb. 16, March 17, May 4, Aug. 19, Oct. 8, 22, Dec. 25

Step Three.....Jan. 25, April 23, 24, May 3, June 1, 13, Sept. 17, 20, Dec. 29

Step Four.....Jan. 26, March 6, 28, April 8, 19, June 26, July 7, 16, Aug. 25, Sept. 3, Oct. 25, Nov. 19, 20, Dec. 2, 29

Step Five.....Jan. 30, March 6, 18, April 8, June 20, Dec. 28

Step Six.....Feb. 1, March 6, 28, 30, Aug. 5, Nov. 20

Step Seven.....March 1, 6, 28, April 8, May 3, 28, June 20, July 24, Oct. 6. Dec. 6, 18, 29

Step Eight.....May 28, Aug. 4, Oct. 6, Nov. 21, Dec. 28

Step Nine.....Jan. 17, March 9, April 8, May 24, July 24, Aug. 4, Oct. 6, 17, 30, Nov. 21, Dec. 6, 29

Step Ten.....Jan. 9, Feb. 13, March 25, April 24, July 5, Oct. 31`

Step Eleven.....Feb. 24, 25, April 16, May 17, July 8, Aug. 17, Oct. 7, Dec. 1, 11, 20

Step Twelve.....Jan. 24, April 12, June 24, Aug. 1, Sept. 20, Oct. 17, 19, 26

Stewardship/leadership.....Feb. 10, April 10, Dec. 27

Subjective Well-Being.....see Happiness

Substitute addictions.....Jan. 2, Feb. 4, 16, June 19, 30, Oct. 9, 10, 12, Nov. 2

Suffering.....Jan. 6, 15, 16, 29, Feb. 15, 20, 24, March 21, April 2, 20, July 14, 29, 31, Aug. 1, 24, 25, Sept. 12, 13, Oct. 25, Nov. 13, 24, 26, 27, Dec. 16

Taoism.....Jan. 1, Oct. 9, 29

Therapy.....Jan. 25, Feb. 18, March 3, June 2, Aug. 19, Sept. 15, 19, Oct. 18, Nov. 13, Dec. 14

Thirteen Stepping.....Aug. 22, Dec. 15

Time/punctuality.....May 9, 30, June 2, 4, July 4, 14, 23, Aug. 4

Tolerance.....March 10, April 10, May 1, July 27, Sept. 1, 2, 6, 29, Oct. 4, 11, 20, Nov. 11, Dec. 23

Traditions.....Jan. 10, Feb. 10, 26, March 10, April 10, 15, May 10, June 10, 15, July 10, Aug. 1, 10, Sept. 10, Oct. 10, Nov.10, Dec. 10

Transactional Analysis.....Jan. 9, July 28, Oct. 13, 14, 15

Trust.....Feb. 9, 19, March 25, 29, April 1, 5

Truth.....Jan. 7, 27, Feb. 23, July 31, Aug. 6, Nov. 2, Dec. 17

Unconditional love.....Jan. 31, March 9, 29, June 6, 29, Sept. 8, Oct. 3, Dec. 5

Uniqueness.....April 17, March 9, Sept. 18, Dec. 18

Unity.....Jan. 10, Sept. 20, 29

Unrealistic expectations.....March 5, 13, 25, June 30, Oct. 18, Nov. 13, Dec. 14

Values.....Jan. 8, 17, April 26, 27, May 9, July 2, 13, Aug. 2, Nov.3

Withdrawal.....Aug. 3, Sept. 19, Oct. 2

Workaholics Anonymous.....Jan. 16, June 30, Oct. 22

Worry.....May 15, Aug. 12

Writing.....April 28, May 28, July 2

Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow..Jan. 28, May 15, July 28, 30, Sept. 17, Nov. 18

Yin-Yang/Interdependency.....Feb. 1, May 6, 16, 23, Dec. 25

Youth (Teen Addicts Anonymous).....Feb. 11, Aug. 27, Sept. 11

Zen.....Feb. 2, Aug. 26, Oct. 23, Nov. 27, Dec. 14

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- ¹ According to Alcoholics Anonymous Public Information at the General Service Office in 2012, AA has authorized five hundred fellowships/organizations to use the Twelve Steps for their own purposes.
- ² *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 81.
- ³ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 63.
- ⁴ Arthur S. et al, “Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Recovery Outcome Rates”: AA's worldwide population in 1991 was 2,047,250. The low point over 20 years was 1,790,169 in 1995 and the high point, 2,215,239 in 2002; *Box 4-5-9*: The population is 2,133,842 as of the January 2012 survey, accessed December 3, 2012, http://www.aa.org/en_pdfs/en_box459_summer12.pdf.
- ⁵ Kurtz, *Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Note 67: February 6, 1961 letter from Bill W. to Howard E., “As time passes our book literature has a tendency to get more and more frozen, a tendency for conversion into something like dogma, a human trait I am afraid we can do little about. We may as well face the fact that AA will always have its fundamentalists, its absolutists, and its relativists.”
- ⁶ *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life* 2012 survey: accessed November 28, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx>
- ⁷ In 2011 The British Humanist Organization and YouGov Plc in Scotland both reported on survey results showing a decrease in the number of religious adherents compared to the previous survey period. <http://humanism.org.uk/2011/03/20/news-771/> (accessed December 20, 2012) and CBC (June 3, 2008) reported on Harris-Decima’s findings that 25% of Canadians say they do not believe in god. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2008/06/03/f-religion-poll.html> (accessed December 20, 2012).
- ⁸ Tradition Eleven (long form), states, “Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think A.A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.” *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 192.
- ⁹ Keen, “Constructing a Spiritual Bullshit Detector,” *Hymns To An Unknown God*, 110–115: In the chapter, Keen encourages seekers to listen to the wise, but not to quote them verbatim. All that shines blinds, so Keen also suggests watching out for the overwhelming or captivating. We should avoid spiritual teachers who demand obedience, denounce skepticism, don’t live by the same standards they expound and who expect us to put the *program* ahead of family, career or other priorities. If our would-be guru is a zealous cheerleader, that’s another warning. Inasmuch as being self-absorbed is micro-idolatry, talking about one’s [Twelve Step] program as being superior or a divinely inspired treatment is a form of macro-idolatry. We should do a reality check any time we hear ourselves making sweeping claims that are not substantiated. That would be an early sign of *bleeding-deaconism*.
- ¹⁰ The Story of Stuff is the material economy explained in a kind of Fourth Step inventory of our stewardship of planet Earth and/or our own home and family by Tides Foundation, Funders Workgroup for Sustainable Production and Consumption and Free Range Studios. The narrator is Annie Leonard. For more information go to <http://www.storyofstuff.org/> (accessed December 20, 2012).
- ¹¹ The brain’s reward system, or “Go!” system as named in the HBO documentary *Addiction*, is a part of our natural instinct to seek out what we need for survival, be it food, shelter or reproduction. The risk system in the frontal lobe of the brain, the “Stop!” system, evaluates risks and warns us about leaping before we look or entering a dark cave where we hear growling and snarling. These systems work together. “That looks good. Is it worth the risk?” We weigh consequences and decide if and when to go for something that is both rewarding and potentially risky. “With addicts, however, it is as though [the risk/reward systems] have become functionally disconnected. It is as though the ‘Go!’ system is sort of running off on its own, is a rogue system now and is not interacting in a regular, seamless integrated way with the ‘Stop!’ system,” says Anna Rose Childress, Ph.D., of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. The “Go!” system can be triggered so quickly that we’re unaware of it, and can and will move us to take action before the risk (“Stop!”) system can mount a defense or even become engaged.
- ¹² Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*. Permission to use chart granted by Copyright Clearance Center on behalf of Perseus Books Group License Number: 2984231236182 granted September 8, 2012.
- ¹³ Bretherton, “The Origins of Attachment Theory,” *Developmental Psychology* 1992, 759–775: John Bowlby coined the term “attachment theory” after studying delinquents and homeless children. He discovered that the foundation of successful social, emotional and cognitive development depended on a continuous, caring and

secure attachment relationship between the child and caregiver. “Mary Ainsworth’s innovative methodology not only made it possible to test some of Bowlby’s ideas empirically but also helped expand the theory itself and is responsible for some of the new directions it is now taking.” People who suffer from oppositional defiant disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder commonly show an absence of secure and healthy attachment. Criminalized violent offenders have a shockingly high rate of attachment disorder.

¹⁴ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 189.

¹⁵ TheWeek.com, Editorial Staff, April 13, 2012, “The rise of atheism in America,” accessed December 4, 2012, <http://theweek.com/article/index/226625/the-rise-of-atheism-in-america>: “Between 1.5 and 4 percent of Americans admit to so-called ‘hard atheism,’ the conviction that no higher power exists. But a much larger share of the American public (19 percent) spurns organized religion in favor of a non-defined skepticism about faith. This group, sometimes collectively labeled the ‘Nones,’ is growing faster than any religious faith in the U.S. About two thirds of Nones say they are former believers.” The data came from Win-Gallup International *Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism – 2012* (<http://redcresearch.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/RED-C-press-release-Religion-and-Atheism-25-7-12.pdf>, accessed December 4, 2012), which reports that 59% of people consider themselves religious, 23% not religious and 13% are atheists worldwide. The religious population in the USA dropped from 73% to 60% between 2005 and 2012. Countries included with the lowest number of believers in a God or higher power include Australia, Austria, Czech Republic, Canada, China, France, Ireland, Japan and Scandinavian countries.

¹⁶ “Adult Children of Alcoholics,” accessed November 28, 2012. <http://www.renascent.ca/2012/04/adult-children-of-alcoholics/>.

¹⁷ Adult Children of Alcoholics literature and website provide a self-diagnostic lists of symptoms called “The Laundry List,” accessed November 28, 2012. http://www.adultchildren.org/lit/Laundry_List.php. Claudia Black, Earnie Larsen and John Bradshaw are some of the specialists in Adult Children (of Alcoholics) issues.

¹⁸ *A Skeptic’s Guide to the 12 Steps* is Philip Z.’s first person recovery journey as well as a clinical explanation of the Twelve Step process from Jungian and transpersonal psychology, Buddhism, Eastern philosophy and his faith of birth, Judaism. Philip Z. is an Overeaters Anonymous member, atheist and psychotherapist. For further information: http://www.hazelden.org/OA_HTML/ibeCCtPltmDspRte.jsp?a=b&item=4009.

¹⁹ Wilson, *As Bill Sees It*, 86.

²⁰ “Special Populations and Co-occurring Disorders,” accessed November 28, 2012, <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/special-populations-co-occurring-disorders>.

²¹ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 146.

²² Olson, “FACES IV & the Circumplex Model: Validation Study” *In Press, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, accessed November 29, 2012. http://facesiv.com/pdf/facesiv_validation_2010.pdf.

²³ AA pamphlet P-17, “A.A. Tradition—How It Developed” summarizes Bill W.’s Grapevine articles from 1946 to 1947. Bill writes, “The number of membership rules which have been made (and mostly broken!) are legion” and goes on to say, “The way our ‘worthy’ alcoholics have sometimes tried to judge the ‘less worthy’ is, as we look back on it, rather comical.”

²⁴ Connock et al, “Methadone and buprenorphine for the management of opioid dependence: a systematic review and economic evaluation,” accessed November 29, 2012, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0015139/>: This is the summary of a ten year study in the UK, from 1996 to 2005, looking at the effectiveness of different treatment regimens for opioid addicts.

²⁵ “Books That Shaped America’ Exhibition to Open June 25,” last modified July 2, 2012, accessed November 29, 2012, <http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2012/12-123.html>.

²⁶ Buddhists announce to AA that they would love to be part of AA, yet they would be replacing the word “god” with “good” so that the practice of the Steps could be compatible with their non-theistic belief. In 1957, Bill writes: “To some of us, the idea of substituting ‘good’ for ‘God’ in the Twelve Steps will seem like a watering down of A.A.’s message. But here we must remember that A.A.’s Steps are suggestions only. A belief in them, as they stand, is not at all a requirement for membership among us. This liberty has made A.A. available to thousands who never would have tried at all had we insisted on the Twelve Steps just as written.” *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, 81.

²⁷ “Interview: A Doctor Speaks,” *AA Grapevine*, Vol. 57, No. 12 (May 2001).

²⁸ Thailo, “An Atheist’s Guide to Twelve-Step Recovery from Substance Addiction,” accessed November 29, 2012, http://everything2.com/title/12-step+program?author_id=2018863#thailo.