

Psychic Change

Mental health is dedication to reality at all costs... —M. Scott Peck

As addicts we are most committed to escaping reality. We chase after delusions and so we attach our power to substances, which induce perceptual changes and help us to disconnect from reality. We obstinately carry on until our internal euphoria supply is exhausted and we are left empty and desperate. In recovery we are meant to withdraw our spirit from the insatiable object of desire. In order to accomplish this, we must be willing to undergo a psychic change and find a way to befriend reality. We are offered spiritual principles as tools for this essential psychological reorientation. A gradual shift in our thought process alters our perception and transforms our reality as a friendlier emotional climate emerges. While faith replaces fear, obsessive cravings wither away and we get the chance to experience life in a novel, more hopeful way. As a consequence, we are empowered to set in motion more functional behavior patterns and turn our fate around.

In recovery we let go of judgmental attitudes and take responsibility for our own actions and our well-being. We take our power back from excessive attachments and expectations. We learn how to let go of resistance and defiance, replace it with acceptance, and become willing to seek out more functional behaviors. People begin to react differently to us, as well. Gradually a different reality begins to emerge. We are creatures of habit, though. We like to keep the momentum going and stick with the familiar, even if it's not working for us. The unknown can be scary. This is why "hitting bottom," where we cannot stand our misery anymore, is considered important. This so-called "gift of desperation" can compel us to surrender and be willing to learn a new way of life.

In the basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous, Dr. Bill Silkworth states that the chronic alcoholic must experience "an entire psychic change" (AA, pg. xxvii). He proposes a solution to overcome this otherwise hopeless condition via "twelve steps" to recovery. The program uses a spiritual orientation and concepts of cognitive-behavioral therapy to encourage and support a psychic change. We are guided to surrender to a Higher Power and adopt moral principles. In order to let go of toxic attachments and resentments, it is suggested that we take a good look at our own actions only. We see that self-obsessed fear, self-indulgence, and indecent behaviors bring about suffering. We are shown how to give meaning to our shameful memories – by sharing our experiences so they can benefit others. Self-esteem is restored through making amends for the past, and doing estimable acts in the present. We find the strength to endure unpleasant feelings and difficult life phases. As we live recovery one day at a time, we replace fear and resentments with serenity and peace. We focus on kind and responsible behavior at all times. We turn from our own worst enemy into our own best friend.

This is our chance to recover our life's purpose and become useful family members, good friends, and respectable people. It is the path of liberation from the slavery of

compulsive need gratification at any cost. It may seem like a paradox, but this is what happens: we admit our powerlessness and regain our power of choice.

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