

WAKING UP SOBER EXCERPTS for YOU

I Died One Hundred Times

It has been seen as a “seemingly hopeless state of mind and body” (big book, Alcoholics Anonymous), and often, it still appears that way. The medical community used to shun us, and it can still be that way. The legal system used to punish us, and it’s still that way. The alcoholic/addict is most difficult to deal with; she is described as “restless, irritable, and discontented” as well as “selfish, self-centered, and inconsiderate” (big book, Alcoholics Anonymous). It can appear as though she is voluntarily choosing to abandon her children, herself, and, really, her whole life for a glass of wine, a pill, a line of cocaine, a hit of the pipe, or a shot of opiates.

This, then, routinely disables her internal control mechanism. Once intoxicated, her inhibitions are rendered inoperative, and so she usually finds it impossible to stop before everything turns into disaster (again). When she’s only vaguely cognizant, she doesn’t show up for her responsibilities, and she is incapable of continuity, accountability, and reliability. She might undergo an instant personality change like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. She may display utterly unspeakable behaviors. She could become belligerent, promiscuous, or crazy. Afterward, she may experience some drug-induced amnesia (a.k.a. blackouts). When she fails at controlling cravings and other impulses, she becomes flooded with guilt, shame, regret, remorse, and self-loathing. Her family gives up trust and faith. Her children might lose the chance for happiness. It looks hopeless.

It seems as though she doesn’t want to learn from experience. She cannot befriend reality; she much prefers fantasy and illusion. She distorts the truth and denies the obvious. She must defend her ego, improve her mood, increase her self-confidence, and find a little joy—at *any* price. She is ready for the ultimate sacrifice. Under the influence of substances (or behaviors) that change her mood and perception, her existential pain eases, she can forget the gut-wrenching fear, and she can finally take a sigh of relief. Then she rediscovers self-confidence and courage, which is sorely missed when she is left to her own devices, and life becomes tolerable for a moment.

She remains immersed in the addict world, enslaved by supply necessities, without a belief in herself, the chance of freedom, or the power for transformation. She cannot reach the tipping point, where the intensity of suffering overpowers her resistance to change. As long as she refuses to undergo a metamorphosis, she is stuck; she can't move from tadpole to frog. She withers and drowns in the end.

If she gets clean against all odds, she is then faced with the wreckage of her disease. Looking at all of it stark raving sober can be devastating. She is tempted to turn around and go back into the dark tunnel of what she knows. If she can be motivated to recovery, she will need ongoing treatment for her chronic illness. Without learning how to love herself in spite of everything, the prospect of a new life may not be doable, conceivable, or even desirable, but even addicts with severe issues can recover if they are offered hope packaged in a viable solution such as the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Mindfulness

You may have tried to distract yourself from unpleasant emotions. If distractions are about trying to forget anxiety and depression, then mindfulness is the opposite; it's about embracing your inner reality. You can cultivate present-moment awareness and regulate emotions simply by paying attention to what is going on with you. Your inner self wants to be acknowledged. The practice of listening to your feelings is healing.

- 1) Somatic experiencing—scan your body from head to toe; take note of the physical representation of feeling—that is, the location and intensity of feeling in the body. Rate it on pain scale 1–10.
You may realize that the feeling is not as bad as you thought.
- 2) INOF (Identify, Name, and Own Feeling)—For example, anxiety, depression, and anger—allow it to be there in spite of discomfort, without judging it as bad, and without trying to suppress or alter it.
This allows you to stop over-identifying with the current state (of discomfort) as you notice that you are the one sitting and noticing, while the feeling is just that—a feeling—a transient aspect of your existential condition.
- 3) Conscious breathing—attend to your breath; notice how it easily flows through you. Let go of whatever you're holding on to.
Imagine that you are a funnel for life energy.
- 4) Gratitude prayer—give thanks for this day and the blue sky above.
Welcome the current situation as your fate for now, and list some good things you can think of at this moment.
This helps to let go of resistance and regain balance.
- 5) Introduce solution—ask a higher power for guidance on your path.
This allows for hope and creates a receptive mode in your subconscious mind for solutions to appear.
- 6) Practice daily—monitor feelings daily and when agitation recurs, whenever necessary, take a moment and repeat the process.
Notice how you can regulate discomfort and improve your mood.

The Ism or Geriatric Children

Alcoholism is not
about the type of substance used,
be it powder, pill, or liquid.
It doesn't matter how it's done.

The ism is about being a stranger to planet earth,
ill equipped to care for the body given,
ignorant to what anything means,
and disconnected from everyone.
In spite of intelligence,
talents, potential, assets, and gifts,
eventually, the freedom of choice is lost.
Distorted perceptions keep him stuck, and
he turns into an old child.

No progress to be had
with maturation or empowerment—
experiences are not processed consciously
and integrated properly.
At the mercy of legal restrictions,
translucent to authorities and institutions,
he regresses to parental control
or the exploitation of a string of strangers.

Addiction is a complex syndrome, to be understood
beyond the lack of age-appropriate behaviors
on a plane above the physical.

She suffers from a chronic condition
that requires ongoing treatment.
She resists it though,
sick and tired of such suffering,
routinely indignant and outraged and so,

she needs some good dope to get her through the night
and forget about the shame and guilt
and the price she is paying.
Stuck in eternal *Groundhog Day*
denial is indispensable, and self-medication is a must.

A healthy young man, he has reduced
his mental world to the choice between prison and rehab,
preferring rehab for its amenities (and pool).
He has internalized the bars in his head,
locking out the rest of the world.
He is like the elephant born in captivity
who was chained to a pole and gave up
trying to loose the shackles.
It's called learned helplessness—
and it's also a feature of the ism.

She started out irritable, restless, and discontent,
but take away her dope...and she crumbles,
feeling vulnerable, insecure, needy, and lost.
And this is why she keeps relapsing "for no apparent reason."
Left to her own devices, she finds life intolerable.
She doesn't really want to be there sober.
She cannot stand it without some chemical buffer,
and consequently, her obstacles seemingly grow into
insurmountable mountains.
If she could understand the nature of the beast
so as not to underestimate it, she might come better equipped.
Last time she was getting ready to fend off the grizzly bear
by waving a plastic dinner fork...
she lost.

He lives in the Realm of the Hungry Ghosts—

perennial insatiable hunger for something
outside of self.

Feeling disconnected, he remains
locked within his inner hell.

He denies the existence of a higher power
as though the world beyond his head has ceased to exist.

And so he goes back to what he knows,
compulsively pursuing chemicals and behaviors,
moving from alcohol to drugs or pills
or sex or food, or a combination,
to fill the inner emptiness with that which MUST cause pain.

Whatever he tries...it's never enough.

With all his energy tied to a losing battle,
the pursuit of hedonism is futile,
sought-after contentment remains elusive, and
the door to healing remains locked.

A shipwreck survivor, she is offered a lifesaver.

She looks at it briefly, holds on momentarily,
then says, I don't really like the color of it,
I don't like how you're throwing it at me,
and I'm not so sure that you really get me.

She lets go and is caught by sober-living staff
making out in the bushes behind the AA meeting
with a random acquaintance.

She is a thirty-four-year-old mother of two,
having lost custody due to the ism.

Her mother never protected her from
sexual molestation by the father.

The mother visits her at rehab,
blames her for being stupid and dysfunctional,
and takes her children,
with their dad and his new woman, to Disneyland...

while her heart breaks.

Her wild emotions, disordered thinking,
twisted perceptions, discontinuous behaviors,
missing purpose and direction;
her shameless oddities and fierce suffering
create chaos and drama.

Between sleepless nights and temper tantrums,
there is no time to seize the day for any good endeavors.
The chance for a stable and happy life
gets misplaced, and she goes down.

The ism of alcoholism is about
the need for distraction from the status quo,
departure from reality, oblivion at any price.
To the bystander, her behavior makes no sense;
it is counterintuitive and incomprehensible.
For her, it's not negotiable; she lives in a whirlwind,
continually flooded with sizzling feelings and urges.
She expresses her intensity;
she turns you on and breaks your heart.
Then she distorts and misunderstands, defends and protects;
she will tell you all about being victimized (it's true).
She hurts and disrespects you, and then she drops you.
Just like that.

Newly clean, he falls for a newly sober woman,
relapses, and continues to drink, saying,
"I'm clean now. I'm not doing crack anymore."
His woman tries to get her life together.
He interferes, coming home from the bar on Sunday morning
needy, anxious, irritable, aching for some loving.
Without instant soothing from her,
suffering from her indifference,

he settles for negative attention by irritating her
with unreasonable statements and demands.

The sober woman—why is she in it?

It's the ism.

The addict is meant to stop running from life,
befriend reality, and find some willingness
to endure the truth.

This can be accomplished through rising above, so to speak,
to a higher plane—

a psychic change via a spiritual awakening,

where she is to understand that

it's all about connecting with life,

that she is to make herself useful

and bring forth some love and joy.

That's her ticket to freedom—

only then will she come to see her life as worthwhile.

Recovery in a Nutshell

Know that your life reflects your thoughts, words, and actions.

- 1) Be kind. Don't hurt anyone—not even yourself.
- 2) Look for the good.
- 3) Don't expect anything.
- 4) Focus on gratitude.
- 5) Heal the past.
- 6) Forgive everybody for everything—yes, even yourself.
- 7) Don't indulge in resentments. Blaming is for amateurs—you squander your power and ruin everybody's mood.
- 8) Don't act out mindlessly (aggressive, sexual, or otherwise).
- 9) Embrace your truth. You're free to change today.
- 10) Respect the magic of the spoken word—share in a frame of love.
- 11) Recovery is about learning a new way of thinking, a new language.
(It's not about others understanding why you self-destruct.)
- 12) Get a sponsor and do AA twelve steps.
(It can be like an enema for letting go of toxic waste that's burdening you.)
- 13) Trust the process. Recovery works as long as you do it every day.
- 14) When you're stuck, ask both people and Higher Power for help.
- 15) Grow self-esteem through estimable behavior.
- 16) Give what you want to get.
- 17) Make yourself useful (and you won't feel worthless).
- 18) Get ready to receive. What you do comes back to you like a boomerang
(fate doesn't allow for excuses in the matter).
- 19) Show up for life. Be here now. Participate. Engage.
- 20) The ball is in your court.

Do you relate? How does this apply to you?

Saint Francis prayer:

“God, make me a channel of thy peace—that where there is hatred, I may bring love—that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness—that where there is discord, I may

bring harmony—that where there is error, I may bring truth—that where there is doubt, I may bring faith—that where there is despair, I may bring hope—that where there are shadows, I may bring light—that where there is sadness, I may bring joy. Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted, to understand than to be understood, to love than to be loved. For it is by self-forgetting that one finds. It is by forgiving that one is forgiven. It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.”

Dog Race

Everyone has his own life to live.

We just can't help it.

A sign is held up ahead like the sausage at the dog race:

"Must be young and pretty, thin and rich."

Meanwhile, it's not about that at all.

The surrounding wants to be acknowledged.

We ache to be heard and understood

and have some joy too.

But then it's about participation,

thoughts, words, and actions,

the traces of our existence—

but even that's fleeting.

Maybe it's rather about the wind

gently touching the skin as we rush along,

the moments of bliss shared

with a human or furry little animal.

Could be, you know.

Note: Not a one of the dogs actually gets the sausage.

It's a futile quest.