

AA EMOTIONAL SOBRIETY WORKSHOP: SEPTEMBER 5, 2020

Emotions (feelings) just are.

Thinking decides how I deal with my emotions. My *will* directs my thinking. God's will directs my *will*, changing my *thinking*, to deal differently with my *emotions*, changing my *actions*.

"... Thy will (not mine) be done'." "It is the proper use of the will." p. 85

"... we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask [God] for the right thought or action." p. 87

The Problem, the Reason for the Problem and the Solution. (See Attachment One, page 6)

What is "emotional sobriety"?

"... the *ability* to deal with feelings *positively*. The individual who is emotionally sober might not always be walking around bursting with joy, but they will no longer be a *victim* of their *emotions*.

This type of *sobriety* can be defined as the ability to feel their feelings." (AAC)

- *ability*: "the means or skill to do something" ... learn the means (1-9), practice the skill (10-12)
- *positively*: "optimism, agreement, acceptance" ... agree with, accept, be grateful for feeling.
- *victim*: "a person who is harmed, injured, or tricked." ("relieve me of the bondage of self")
- *emotion*: "instinctive or intuitive feeling, as distinct from reasoning or knowledge."
- *sobriety*: "the natural state of a human being given at birth; independence from alcohol."

"... to be in the nature of huge **emotional** displacements and rearrangements." p. 27

"... we couldn't control our **emotional** natures ... prey to misery and depression..." p. 52

"There are those, too, who suffer from grave **emotional** and mental disorders ..." p. 58

"Unless the reason is understood, there may be an **emotional** upset." p. 134

"Our desires for sex, for material and emotional security ... tyrannize us." 12x12, pp. 42-45

"These adolescent urges that so many of us have for top approval (*emotional*), perfect security (*material*) and perfect romance (*sex*) — urges quite appropriate to age seventeen — prove to be an impossible way of life at age forty-seven or fifty-seven."

"Since AA began, I have taken huge wallops in all these areas because of my failure

to grow up, **emotionally and spiritually.**" Bill W., Grapevine, 1958.

How do we find "emotional sobriety"?

(See Attachment Two, page 7)

"Here we begin to practice all Twelve Steps of the program in our daily lives so that we and those about us may find **emotional** sobriety."

"... as a result of practicing all the Steps, we have each found something called a spiritual awakening ... the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, **feel**, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone. He has been granted ... a free gift ... AA's manner of making ready to receive this gift lies in the practice of the Twelve Steps..." AA 12x12, pp. 106-107

Let's dispel a few myths that have often hindered our recovery:

- "AA doesn't deal with feelings." NOT TRUE!
- "Bring the body and the mind will follow." ONLY PARTIALLY TRUE.
- "Don't drink, go to meetings, trust some God, help another drunk, you'll be fine." NOT SO!
- "We don't care how you feel — just do it." NOT VERY HELPFUL IN THE LONG RUN!

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Practicing the Twelve Steps of Recovery to Find Emotional Sobriety

Step One. *We admitted* we were powerless. We came to *accept* that our lives were unmanageable when we denied that we were powerless, beginning with alcohol. pp. xxv-16

“Certainly I was interested. I had to be, for I was hopeless.” p. 10

“Every *natural instinct* (desire for sex, material, emotional security) cries out against the idea of personal powerless.” 12x12, p.21

I am powerless over every feeling I feel — at first! Until I learn how to “feel” the feeling without acting on it right away, I will always be an emotional “*King or Queen Baby*”. Most people, circumstances, situations, institutions, and organizations “rubbed me the wrong way”. I was powerless over them and how they made me feel. I was always going to be “Baby”, with unmanageable emotions. I was afraid of not getting my way, so I got angry. I was afraid you would find out I was afraid, so I got more angry. The only feeling I thought I had was anger!

Example: throwing the puppy against the bedroom dresser ... at three years sober!

Step Two. *Came to believe (admitted)* that I needed help with my emotions, that there might be a Power that could help me and, most importantly, that Power was not me. pp. 17-57
(Big Book Chapters Two, Three and Four deal with denial, defiance and doubt of my need for help)

“... couldn’t control our emotional natures ... a prey to misery and depression...” p. 52

“Belief meant reliance, not defiance ... meet and transcend their other pains...” 12x12, p. 31

I am powerless over every feeling when it first occurs, so my Help must be able to help me change how I “**admit, identify and deal**” with my feelings (emotional A.I.D.). In my emotional recovery from permanent “Baby-hood” or adolescence, I come to believe that such Help is possible. I do not need to know how, when or what this help will be. I am willing to hope such a Helping Power is available to me. “Coming to believe” is learning to hope that such Helping Power is available to me and that I can learn to receive it.

Example: Witnessing Aaron W. endure public slander with peace, calm and dignity.

Step Three. *Made a decision (admit a desire)* to seek God’s help with my emotions. pp. 60-63

“Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity ...” p. 62

“But the moment our mental or emotional independence is in question, how differently we behave.” 12x12, p.37

I am powerless over my “first feeling”, so I must accept the fact that I need help to grow up and out of adolescence. Further, I find that I am powerless over feelings such as resentment, because they give me the illusion of power and control. I tell me “I can handle it”. I know the problem; I can stop it from bring a problem. Turns out, not so! Once I have made a decision to seek help from the God of my understanding, I accept the fact that I do not yet know how, when or what this help will be. I am making a decision to learn how to seek help to find emotional sobriety.

Example: Craig W. helping me decide to apply the Steps to my surprise, sadness and anger.

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Step Four. Use the Step Four inventory instructions and outline in the AA Big Book to **identify** my real emotions of anger, resentment, fear, unhappiness and sadness. pp. 64-71

“It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness.” p. 66

“Nearly every serious emotional problem can be seen as a case of misdirected instinct.” (as in sex, material, emotional security) 12x12, p. 42

When I begin writing Column One of my Resentment Inventory, it is so easy, even pleasurable! I am making a list of all the people, organizations, institutions and beliefs that have ticked me off — going all the way back to childhood! As I move through the Inventory, to Column Two (what they did) and into Column Three, it becomes more difficult. Column Three asks how their action **affects** me, i.e., how did it make me **feel**? In the beginning, I was completely stumped. I only knew **anger** - I **felt** nothing else. This was when I first encountered my lack of emotional sobriety — and I did not know it. In the Fear and Sexual Conduct inventories, more emotional immaturity and insecurity is disclosed to me. As uncomfortable and vulnerable as I feel, I work to be as fearless and thorough as I can be to begin the process of **identifying** my emotions.

Example: Fear inventory with Woody P.

Step Five. Admit to God, myself and my sponsor or trusted spiritual advisor the exact nature of my wrongs, further **identifying** that the underlying problem has been my immature, adolescent instincts causing me to have done wrongs to others. pp. 72-75

“We pocket our pride ... our fears fall from us ... we begin to have a spiritual experience.” p. 75

“Because we were still bothered by fear, self-pity, and hurt feelings, it was probable we couldn’t appraise ourselves fairly at all.” (self-pity: lowest of negative emotions). 12x12, p. 59

Due to job-related relocations, I had six sponsors during my first 12 years of recovery. I did a new 4th and 5th step with each sponsor. We identified more of my emotions that I had denied and buried since childhood. My earliest fears were of embarrassment and disappointment. I was ashamed of these feelings, so I covered them up with anger, sarcasm, and criticism of others. All I “felt” when I arrived at AA was anger.

Example: Robert B. telling me, “Bill, you’re just not that big of a deal!”

Step Six. Ask God for the willingness to “let go” of the objectionable excess of negative emotions that my sponsor and I have **identified** so that I can become free of their harmful tyranny over my thoughts, words and actions. p. 76

“If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing.” p. 76
“... desires will always be found which oppose the grace of God.” 12x12, p. 66

I “under-used” Step Six for many years. I focused on objectionable words and deeds. I was several years into recovery before I began asking God for the willingness to let go of my fear, anger and unhappiness, whatever the “trigger”. I sought God’s help to move toward finding emotional sobriety, even though I was still getting some “payoff” from those **identified** negative, objectionable feelings.

Example: Asking God for the willingness to see my sarcasm as a symptom of fear and anger.

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Step Seven. I am now willing to “let God” remove from me (help me **deal** with) the excessive negative emotions that block me from being useful to God and others. p. 76

“I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad.” p. 76

“... character defects based upon shortsighted or unworthy desires are the obstacles that block our path ... to live at peace with [ourself] and with [our] fellows.” 12x12, p. 76

In Step Seven, I finally relinquish control of the directorship of my life. I have become willing to “let go” and “let God” have all of me. To me, this means I no longer choose the priorities in my life — God does. This creates additional uncertainty in my life. I do not know what God’s priorities are going to be. So, I must become willing to trust God enough to not fear God’s priorities. From Step Seven forward, I will be letting God help me **admit**, **identify** and **deal** with my emotions. With God’s help, I will attempt to no longer deny, defy or doubt the reality of my feelings.

Example: Every Step Eight list I ever wrote; every choice I ever made: all uncertain outcomes!

Step Eight. I am now willing to list the people I have harmed and take responsibility for the wrong things I did that harmed them, **dealing** with the emotions that caused my wrong actions as well as the feelings that make me reluctant to even consider making amends. p. 76

“We have a list of all persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory.” (see pp. 67, 68, 69.) p. 76

“To define the word ‘harm’ ... we might call it the results of instincts in collision, which cause physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual damage to people.” 12x12, p. 80

“Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.” With this prayer, the Big Book leads me from Step Seven directly into Step Eight. Yes, I absolutely need God’s strength to even consider finally taking responsibility for the wrong things I did that harmed others, as well as the inevitable feelings of fear, anger and sadness that overwhelm me. This is the beginning of a lifetime practice of **dealing** with my emotion in a positive manner.

Example: Writing my Step Eight list concerning former wife #2.

Step Nine. I begin to **deal** with the consequences of my harms to others caused in large part by my selfish, self-centered choices driven by emotions wanting too much material, social or sexual security. pp. 76-83

“Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves.” p. 76

“... we cannot buy our own peace of mind at the expense of others.” 12x12, p.84

I make my direct amends, one by one, taking care to “keep it simple”. I admit to each of them what I did wrong and that I am willing to do whatever I can to make things right, financial and otherwise. I do not blame my angers, fears and sadness for what I did to them. I **deal** with these feelings, as well as the fear and resentment I may feel during the amend, by continuously asking God for his strength and discussing them with my sponsor.

Example: Amend to _____ recently.

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Step Ten. Throughout each day, I continue to watch for and **deal** with selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. How do I **deal** with them? By asking God and others for help, making amends quickly when needed and trying to help others. pp. 84-85

“We have entered the world of the Spirit. Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime.” p. 84

“... can we stay sober, keep in emotional balance, and live to good purpose under all conditions?” 12x12, p. 88

“That is the emotional hangover, the direct result of yesterday’s and sometimes today’s excesses of negative emotions — anger, fear, jealousy, and the like. If we would live serenely today and tomorrow, we certainly need to eliminate these hangovers.” 12x12, p. 88

I am not cured of alcoholism. My daily reprieve is contingent upon growing my spiritual life, in part by **admitting, identifying and dealing** with all my emotions, especially the negative ones, in a way that is helpful to me and not harmful to others. “Love and tolerance of others is our code.” Love here is to decide and sacrifice, unconditionally. “*Don’t do the next wrong thing.*”

Example: “Blackboard” in morning meditation; “Thy will (not mine) be done” through the day.

Step Eleven. I desire to improve my conscious relationship with God today. I seek His will for me and His Power to carry out His will through me. Each day, I use his help to **deal** with negative emotions while nourishing positive emotions. pp. 85-88

“If we have carefully followed directions, we have begun to sense the flow of His Spirit into us. To some extent we have become God-conscious. We have begun to develop this vital sixth sense. But we must go further and that means more action.” p. 85

“And when we turn away from meditation and prayer, we likewise deprive our minds, our emotions, and our intuitions of vitally needed support.” 12x12, p. 97

Whether I use the “directed thinking” style of meditation and prayer in the Big Book or the style of prayer on p. 99 of the 12x12 (credited to one who is described as having been “through the emotional wringer”), the purpose for me is to **admit, identify and deal** with all my emotions. I seek help from God and others to amplify the healthy emotions to good effect for me and others and minimize the way my unhealthy emotions can cause harm to me and others.

Example: “Thy will be done”. “*Do the next right thing.*”

Step Twelve. I try to pass the recovery message of emotional sobriety on to others and I try to practice the principles of, **deal** with, emotional sobriety in all of my affairs. pp. 89-164

“We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous and free (from anger and fear).” p. 133
“... practice all Twelve Steps ... daily ... that we may find emotional sobriety.” 12x12, p.106

“We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us.” p. 164

Example: A ——— Without Borders — this workshop — today!!!!

THE PROBLEM, THE REASON AND THE SOLUTION

(Attachment One)

The Problem.

Two of the many places in Alcoholics Anonymous that the “**problem**” is described and defined:

“We are equally positive that once he takes any alcohol whatever into his system, something happens, both in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for him to stop. (**Physical allergy, craving**) p. 22

“*The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink.*” (**mental obsession, lack of sanity**) p. 24

The Reason for the Problem.

Presented many times in our book, perhaps nowhere better than in “The Doctor’s Opinion”:

“Men and woman drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks — drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.” (**psychic change** alters how I deal with feelings). pp. xxviii-xxix

Consider some definitions to help us understand why the reason for the problem leads us to a solution that includes emotional sobriety:

- effect: a **change** as a result of an action; a consequence.
- sensation, sense: a **feeling** from something that happens to the body.
- restless: having no physical or **emotional** rest.
- irritable: easily annoyed or made **angry**.
- discontent: a restless **desire; craving** something I do not have, i.e., ease, comfort.
- ease: absence of difficulty.
- comfort: easing of **feelings** of distress.
- desire: strong **feeling** of wanting to have something.

The Solution.

One of the most powerful **solution** statements in the Big Book is from Dr. Carl Jung:

“The doctor said: ‘You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen one single case recover, where that state of mind existed to the extent it does in you.’ “

“He said to the doctor, ‘Is there no exception?’ “

“‘Yes,’ replied the doctor, there is ... exceptions to cases such as yours ... appear to be in the nature of huge **emotional** displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, attitudes and **emotions** which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men were suddenly cast to one side ... I have been trying to produce some such **emotional** rearrangement within you ... I have never been successful with an alcoholic of you description.’ “ p. 27

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SOME BACKGROUND: HUMAN EMOTIONS AND EMOTIONAL SOBRIETY

(Attachment Two)

A Brief Review of Attempts to Explain our Emotions.

- * 400 BC. Chinese Book of Rites.
 - Possibly part of the teachings of Confucius.
 - Describes seven “feelings”: joy, anger, sadness, fear, love, disliking, liking.

- * 1914. Dr. Sigmund Freud.
 - “His Majesty, the Baby”, the egomania or fixation with oneself, especially an obsession with meeting the primary emotional needs of warmth, security and comfort (i.e., sex, material and emotional security).

- * 1930. Dr. Carl Jung.
 - Believed “emotional rearrangement” was possible.

- * 1970s. Dr. Paul Ekman.
 - Presented six basic emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, surprise, later adding shame, embarrassment, excitement and others.
 - known for developing the study of “microexpressions” (*Lie to Me*).

- * 1980s. Dr. Robert Plutchik.
 - Presented the “wheel of emotions”, suggesting various combinations and intensities of eight primary bipolar emotions: joy versus sadness, anger versus fear, trust versus disgust and surprise versus anticipation.

- * 1986. Tom Cunningham, Hazelden.
 - Applied “King (Queen) Baby” syndrome to alcoholics.

- * 2017. A study presented 27 different categories of emotions.

- * 2019. Fushan Wang and Jason H. Huang, *Frontiers in Psychology*.
 - Present four kinds of basic, primitive survival emotions or internal states — happiness, sadness, fear and anger, with three core effects:
 1. Reward (happiness)
 2. Punishment (sadness)
 3. Stress (fear and anger)
 - These are combined in various proportions to produce more complex “higher order” emotions.

If you think you have struggled with understanding your emotions, you are not alone!!!!

Bill Wilson’s growing understanding of Emotional Sobriety.

Over the years, Bill talked with, corresponded with and read many of the leading thinkers of his time, including Dr. Carl Jung, William James, Rev. S. Shoemaker, Edward Dowling, S.J., Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, Dr. Harry M. Tiebout, and others. From his early decision to quote Dr. Jung in Chapter Two of Alcoholics Anonymous, to his accurate descriptions of emotional sobriety in the AA 12x12, to his later letters and articles about emotional sobriety, Bill consistently and accurately described this significant component of Twelve Step recovery.

“Admit, Identify, Deal” (Emotional “A.I.D.”)

Steps 1 through 3: we **admit** our emotions, our powerlessness over them and need for help.

Steps 4 through 6: we **identify** the objectionable emotions that are causing us trouble.

Steps 7 through 12: we learn to **deal** with all of our emotions in a positive manner.