

The Eye Opener

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Your Experience, Strength and Hope Via the Written Word

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

I am grateful that AA has provided me with so many tools not only to stay sober but to have a shot at being happy, joyous, and free. I am appreciative that when I took my last drink on July 29, 2002 I entered into a world of solutions that helped me emerge from the muck and mire of resentment, selfishness, and pride into this new world of sobriety.

There are so many tools. The toolkit is not only full but over the years I've developed some tools of my own, maybe adding some new grooves or refinements to the "wrench" that will fit any "nut", that is, myself when my thinking goes awry.

There are the spiritual tools: prayer and often the "God help me" thought or whisper. It says in our literature that God will never let us down. When I think of AA, I think that one of the first tools was the telephone, used by Bill Wilson when he was pacing that hotel lobby in Akron. He needed help to turn away from that crowd at the bar. He used the telephone,

an action which led to his historic meeting with Dr. Bob.

The essence of the program as Bill and Dr. Bob learned is "one alcoholic talking to another." That has been made easier over the decades - cell phones, e-mail, texts, whatever. Yet, as AA recognized, the preferable way is not "modem to modem" but alcoholics speaking "the language of the heart."

Long before I became sober, I remember watching an old super-8 film of a talk by Bill Wilson. Today, thanks to You Tube and other electronic means, one

alcoholic that "you ARE no longer alone."

Meeting lists, newsletters, pamphlets, the Grapevine, the Eye Opener, and the reams of AA literature enable me to tackle any personal problem, AA service task, or other alcohol-related medical and service educational materials. And thanks to people right in this area, AA has been made available to people suffering from disabilities. Language barriers have been overcome. And the "thousand-pound telephone" requiring one's last quarter has been replaced by other forms of modern communication in the electronic age.

So many tools. And as AA always emphasizes there are "The Basics." As the May 2012 edition of the Grapevine showed on its cover: STEPS, SERVICE, FELLOWSHIP, TRADITIONS, SPONSORSHIP, ACCEPTANCE, TRUST IN GOD, MEETINGS, SHARING, and SLOGANS.

Even before utilizing these tools--for one's self and/or to help another alcoholic, there is the attitude of gratitude, just one key



can access thousands of recordings of Bill, early AA speakers, and many AA talks from around the globe. There are so many technical aids which ensure the

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to our AA toolbox. As an AA member wrote in the Grapevine in February 2017: "The Secret is there is no Secret, Working the steps with a sponsor, going to meetings, helping others and above all keeping God and sobriety first have kept me sober almost five years now. I always have heard that things in plain sight are the hardest to find."

Thankfully, we all try to keep that kit of spiritual tools ready and available for use

~ Dennis
Brown Bag Group

AA - WOW!

When I first encountered AA, deep in active alcoholism, I was blind to what was to be seen. The rooms were full of people and my brain saw all of them through my defenses of judgement and self-centeredness. I did not see the happiness and freedom lived by many in the rooms. Not only was my body suffering from the craving for alcohol and marijuana,

my spirit was suffering from fear and isolation.

For years for me, my fears of imperfection, powerlessness, poverty, and abandonment kept me constantly on guard and caused me to isolate physically, emotionally and spiritually from you. I was in immense pain. I was living in deep pain from resentments and anger not understood and buried for years. My life experience contributed to immense pain for me: lost girlfriends, broken family, failed business partners, lost friends, failed religious experiences, disappointment in institutions.

Given the gift of desperation when I was confronted with the shame of my behavior and the looming loss of those last relationships I treasured, my son and my wife, I was ready to give up. I thank my Higher Power (who I choose to call God) for guiding me back to Alcoholics Anonymous, a place where my destruction, nearly complete, was not shunned, ridiculed, or derided. It was welcomed. I didn't

realize this was happening to me, my confusion and isolation was so great. But it was you, and God, that helped me find my path to recovery. For all of those AA's in meetings I attended whether you foundering or sharing your sobriety and experience with the 12 steps, I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to attend meetings with you, listen to your stories, your pain and share your laughter. It gives me a clutch in my throat to write these words because my gratitude to you and to God is deep. My life is transformed because of you who came before me and because of my faith.

Today, I practice a spiritual life each day (well, nearly!) with prayer and meditation. I have been able to make amends for the pain I have caused over the many years of my active alcohol and drug abuse to my family, friends, and associates for pushing them away, keeping them at fault and not being of service to them. In conversation with my sponsor just this week, my understanding of



...Live and Let Live...

this was deepened again. And it pleases me now to say it!

If you're new, take heart! There is a solution. Listen, and Act. Hang with the winners. Persevere. Go to meetings, practice the steps, get a sponsor. Admit you don't know much about living and see where that can lead. I sincerely believe a life of sobriety with AA as your guide is possible for you and will indeed create the possibility for you of being happy, joyous and free, as it has for me.

~ *Timmer*

"I'M JOHN, AND I'M
AN ALCOHOLIC"

At the first AA meeting I attended, I introduced myself by saying "I'm John, and I'm an alcoholic." For the next two years, I came to meetings 2-3 times per week, each time saying "I'm John, and I'm an alcoholic." Unfortunately, during that time, I stayed sober only for short periods of time before picking up again (and again, and again). I attended meetings while drinking, and during my short stints of sobriety. At every meeting, I said "I'm an alcoholic," but I never stayed sober very long. Each time the cycle repeated, things got worse. After two years of saying "I'm an alcoholic" at meetings – while continuing to drink – I reached the point of

drinking 24/7. I couldn't go more than two hours, day or night, without an additional drink. I realized I was circling the drain, heading toward death, with no ability to stop myself. And it seemed that AA wasn't helping either.

At that point, I believe my Higher Power intervened. A sudden, intense feeling came over me that I needed to detox myself, go back to AA, and take the program much more seriously than I ever had before. During the self-detox, I had a seizure, hit my head, and knocked myself unconscious. Out cold on my bathroom floor with my shoulder touching a hot radiator, I got what turned out to be a third-degree burn before my wife dragged me away from the heat. EMTs took me to the hospital. When I came awake the next morning, my vital signs were stable, and the doctors sent me home, telling me to see a burn specialist, and to avoid driving for a few days because I might have another seizure.

When I got home that day, December 13, 2009, I called a friend I had met at a 7am meeting and asked if he could give me a ride there the following morning. He picked me up; I went to the meeting with him and told a few people the whole truth about what I'd been doing. They gave me new hope, telling me I didn't have to keep repeating that terrible cycle. I

haven't had a drink since, with the help of my Higher Power, my sponsor, and friends in the program. I call December 13 my sobriety date because it's the day I finally accepted my alcoholism and asked for help. Just "admitting" wasn't enough for me; I needed to reach a point of complete surrender. Recovery began for me only after I accepted, with every particle of my being, that "I'm John, and I'm an alcoholic."

~ *John B.*

I'M A GRATEFUL,
RECOVERING
ALCOHOLIC

Grateful alcoholic? I shook my head in disbelief when I first heard these words at a meeting very early in my sobriety. Since then, step by step, I've come to fully embrace being grateful. From the program and my sponsors, I've heard the message- keep your gratitude list fresh.

Thank you, Bill and Dr. Bob, natives of Vermont, and others present at the creation for planting the roots of alcohol recovery almost 85 years ago. My higher power that I call God offered me the gift of recovery. Why me? The answer is too deep for my words.

I've learned that I have the disease of alcoholism, not some personal failing. And my recovery

is a reprieve. Step 3 is very clear; my whole program depends on the quality of my relationship with the God of my understanding.

And my defects are part of my reality. I'm told that to deal with those defects, I need to be in touch daily with God who is in charge of removing them. So, a measure of gratitude for defects. I don't expect others to give me high fives for them.

I'm grateful for working with sponsees. They keep me honest and my program sharp and in constant touch with the roots of our Fellowship. There is no joy greater than this work.

I'm grateful for family support; not everyone is so fortunate. An example from my heart: on an afternoon in February 2016 when I was to celebrate 30 years, the doorbell rang and there to my surprise was my older son, Gregory, just off a flight from Philly-he smiled and said "Hi Dad, I thought I'd come and help you celebrate." He did 5 years earlier as well.

I don't debate whether there is a God or not. I came into the program with a power no greater than myself. Today the available paths are with a God of my understanding or back to a life of perpetual selfies. I'm grateful for those who are on the daily journey with me-you help me walk the right path.

Today, February 29, my Google Assistant invites me to take full advantage of this Leap Day, do something new, do something dramatic. I'm following the advice of my late sponsor, Jerry F—"Have an ordinary day." That seems just fine to me.

I thank you for reading this and helping me to stay sober. And, may I ask, what's on your gratitude list today?

~ Michael K.
Early Bird Group

ONE DAY AT A TIME
IS THE PATH

My first meeting was The Center Square Promises group in Albany, NY when I was twenty-three. I didn't figure I would really stay sober very long and I didn't see how meetings would help much either. But, if I went to three meetings a week and got my slip signed, I could stay out of jail for a bit so I figured I'd give it a try.

Before I'd been arrested, I had experienced some small surrender to the idea that I was without defense against the first drink and

that my life was unmanageable. I'd had some realization that alcohol was not the whole problem, and that I'd have to do more than quit drinking if I was going to solve this problem. I didn't really know what I could do that would solve the problem, and wasn't really sure it could be solved, but, for a moment, I stopped fighting and surrendered.

At my first meeting we read the third step, in the chapter "How It Works." I found out that selfishness and self-centeredness were the root of my problem. And, as Raymond said at that meeting, "I can't think my way into good behavior, but I can behave my way into better thinking." So began a slow, gradual Spiritual Awakening.

In my years of sobriety in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, I have received many gifts. I have learned to listen, and I listen to learn. I have discovered that God has a plan for all of us. And I have found that a prayer is being of service, and One Day at a Time is the path to a peaceful and contented life.

~ Dan J



Eye Opener Committee

Districts 2 & 11 Vermont

Founder	Erwin L.
Editor	Brigitte S.
District 11 Chair	Brigitte S.
Art/Layout	James G.