




# CHANGING LIVES

## HOW THE “PROGRAM” HELPS US MAINTAIN SOBRIETY & SERENITY IN TOUGH TIMES


Instead of sending a Bridge-centered, happenings-oriented newsletter during the holiday season, we've decided to send a *program*-centered “gift” to our readers. Our staff members will describe how they have been using the twelve steps and twelve traditions along with the concepts and promises of A.A. and Alanon to maintain their own peace of mind in the midst of the threat of terrorism, political ups-and-downs, the out-of-control economy, and personal problems. Here's our gift of experience, strength, and hope:


 A couple months ago, some of us were talking politics at lunch one day when I blurted out the first step: “I admit that I'm powerless over the election and over the economy and that life is unmanageable.” For some reason, just saying it out loud made me laugh and I felt a lot lighter. I've been repeating this version of Step One regularly since then, and it always brings relief.~ Carol


 On a recent trip to the west coast, I ran into several Bridge alumni who were reaping the benefits of working a rigorous recovery program. I was so grateful for them and what they had accomplished that I forgot my own problems. Having an attitude of gratitude is a good defense against worry and woe.~ Paul

 The things that help me the most are (1) keeping the focus on myself and not other people, (2) accepting the fact that we all have the right to be in the world the way we are,


and (3) seeing my mistakes and owning them. I say the Serenity Prayer every day and try to take things one day at a time.~ Peggy


 I'm doing pretty well. I guess you could say I'm downright serene. Financial insecurity? Yes. Fear of financial insecurity? No. Despite uncertain times, all is well. In fact, I'm richly blessed. My wife and kids are precious. My health is decent. I've got the best job in the world. I have family and friends that I truly love. I believe in my heart that they love me too. Who would have thought this was possible? Thank God, I'm an alcoholic. If I weren't, I never would have found this way of life—meetings, a home group, and a sponsor that I have breakfast with once a week, the Big Book, twelve suggested steps, and a simple set of spiritual tools placed at my feet by a loving Higher Power. Political and financial hard times? Phooey! ~ Greg


 My favorite part of the program is “Let Go and Let God” even though it's hard to do. When I finally stop worrying and trying to control things and just trust my Higher Power to take care of me, everything works out fine. I think that's called *faith*.~ Tammy


 I've worked the 3<sup>rd</sup> Step over and over for the past few months in the midst of chaotic circumstances. I either have to trust God or my own thinking. I choose to choose God. I lovingly place my problems in His hands and know that everything will turn out exactly

the way God planned—not *my* way. I find that God's way is much better and a whole lot easier.~ Nancy

 For me, recovery isn't any different in tough times than it is in good times. I can get just as crazy either way. I'm equally powerless in both kinds of circumstances. When that crazy thinking starts, I need to be reminded of three things: there is a God and it's not me; I can't think my way into right living but I can live myself into right thinking; and life is not a problem to be solved but a fantastic mystery to be embraced. Talking and listening in twelve-step meetings is how I am reminded of these realities. So if the demands of *life* or the *holidays* start getting too intense, I know I need to go to a meeting.~ Ed

 Since the beginning of my recovery, the Promises (Big Book, p. 83) have meant a lot to me. I stayed in an untenable situation for years because of fear of economic insecurity. Today, I'm free of that fear. Trusting God to take care of all my needs keeps me serene.~ Vera

 I love the promise in the Big Book which assures me that, if I *live* the principles of the program on a daily basis, I will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle me. Just for today, I choose to believe that promise.~ Kim

 My recovery program keeps me connected to my Higher Power and my sponsor. These two resources give me comfort and acceptance. My serenity is directly proportionate to my willingness to tap into these sources of strength.~ Susan



This line from the *Courage to Change* means a lot to me: “I will thank my Higher Power for whatever I experience today, even if I feel troubled or confused. I know that every experience can offer me a gift. All I have to do is be willing to look at my situation in the light of gratitude.”

~ Ruth



The most helpful recovery tool for me lately has been the concept of “One Day at a Time.” I try to stay in *today* and not borrow trouble from tomorrow. God is in charge and His plans **always** work better than mine in the long run.~ Dee Dee



More than ever, I am embracing the 3rd & 11th Steps. In the process, I’m learning more about trust. The more I seek God’s will and the power to carry it out, the more I see that trust involves letting go of my desire to be comfortable. God’s will isn’t the path of least resistance.

When I follow His lead, I find peace in knowing that He’s in control even when it hurts.~ Scott



Most people want to be on your “short list,” especially in December. It’s like Connie Francis’ old song, “I want to be wanted.” Well, I’ve been “wanted” all right. I was a *person of interest* to the IRS, local sheriff, federal marshal, and other lovable characters. Recovery has taught me the reality of the maxim, “If you don’t learn from your mistakes, what’s the use of making them?” Since I’ve been in the program (and not until), I’ve come to believe that within the love and care of God, everything will turn out all right. Now I worry less. The more I recover from arrogance, pride, fault-finding, etc, the less stressed I am by regrets or by relationship snags I have to sand smooth. Now I know that my supernatural highest power has me on His short list.~ Donovan



The worldwide financial crisis and political divide in our country scare me. My First Step lets me know that I can’t do anything about either situation. I decide to place myself and the rest of the mess in my Higher Power’s care (Steps 2 & 3). I acknowledge my fear (and greed!) in the Fourth and Fifth Steps. Step Six prepares me to take whatever action I need to take and make whatever reasonable changes I can make. The *how-to*’s are put in front of me in the Seventh Step (i.e. tighten my belt financially, etc). In the Eighth Step, I become willing to be more politically open-minded—more spiritual. I practice acceptance of other people’s points of view in the Ninth Step. In Step Ten, I watch for recurring fear and intolerance within myself. In the Eleventh Step, I pray for us all. And sharing my personal experience, strength, and hope with you is my Twelfth Step. Happy Holidays! ~ Tina

## SILENCING SHAMING SELF-TALK

BY SCOTT WHITTLE, M.A., D.MIN.

“*I am such a loser.*” “*How could I be so stupid?*” “*How could I have been so irresponsible?*” “*I should have known better.*” When something in my life goes wrong, these are the kinds of thoughts that dominate my thinking. Recovery has taught me that such thoughts are not part of the standard equipment my Creator gave me. They were instilled within by important people in my life like preachers, parents, coaches and teachers. These were well-intentioned people who misunderstood how to help nurture and grow impressionable young minds. Their life instructions were tainted by their own childhood wounds.

The problem I have had with my parents and/or other authority figures is the same problem we’ve all had. All of them had parents! More so, their parents’ parents and their parents’ grandparents had parents too. So, who’s to blame for the presence of shaming self-talk? Everyone and no one. That’s why we refer to codependency and addiction as no-fault diseases.

The nature of such diseases is that the twisted thinking and acting that goes with them gets handed down through the generations with little or no scrutiny. When left unchallenged, diseased thinking and acting become normalized and go unnoticed. As I work my program, I am discovering that I have allowed some diseased thoughts to live rent-free in my head. But through recovery, I am learning how to distinguish between which thoughts are mine and which thoughts come from others. I am also learning how to deal with them. Here are three ways I am doing this:

**I ask if my thinking is based in reality and self-respect.** If my mental messages are over-qualifying (i.e. always, never, can’t, won’t, etc.) or if they put negative labels on me, then I know they came from the outside. Disrespectful messages need to be scrutinized. I do not need to give such messages absolute power over me.

**I outsource my thinking for analysis by others.** At The Bridge to Recovery we call this “*getting objective data*” or seeking “good orderly direction”. Sponsors and recovering peers are excellent resources for us as we scrutinize and expel the negative messages and shaming voices in our heads.

**I ask if I am thinking redemptive thoughts.** Shaming self-talk condemns and isolates me—prevents me from seeing hope and getting help. Redemption speaks of new beginnings, new opportunities, new ways to embrace the mysteries that life generates. I know that shaming from the outside has infiltrated my thinking when I can’t see hope beyond my character defects.

When things in my life go wrong, I need to keep my thoughts in check. When I can distinguish between my own thoughts and shaming self-talk from outside sources, my Higher Power helps me see clearly that I am loved and a part of something much bigger than me. When shaming self-talk is silenced, I am less likely to medicate the pain such messages produce in my life. I am more inclined to concentrate on the good, right and noble truths about whom I am and where I am going. Inevitably, this points me toward more positive ways of being in this world the way my Creator intended me to be.