

Daily Reflections



by bob k.

November 24 – To the New Thought idealist, it is the world's false definitions of health, wealth, and happiness that weigh down and sicken the soul. Devotional practice – affirmations, prayers, meditations – works to loosen the hold of those false definitions of the spirit and thus restore the “natural health” and prosperity.
Language of the Heart, Trysh Travis, p. 77

Looking back on his unhappy years as a hopelessly compulsive drinker, Bill Wilson could see that he had adopted a flawed value system. When he went to a high school attended largely by the sons and daughters of prosperous parents, he resented being the tall and gawky kid from the neighboring mining village. His grandfather was something of a big fish in that very small pond of East Dorset, but the Griffiths were almost entirely without sophistication.

In Manchester Village, there were stately homes that served as the summer residences of people like Robert Todd Lincoln and Dr. Clark Burnham, whose wife Matilda had inherited the property. Young Bill Wilson decided early on that he wanted to be a Manchester Village person rather than an East Dorset person.

The Vermonter bought into the American dream of starting with a clever idea, working hard to develop that into a profit-generating business, then enjoying the accolades and rewards. At the peak of his success, Wilson was already well on the way to killing himself with alcoholic drinking. His plan was flawed. He later came to reject his former motivations and adopt new ones. *To the New Thought idealist, it is the world's false definitions of health, wealth, and happiness that weigh down and sicken the soul.*

New Thought ideas filtered into Alcoholics Anonymous from a variety of sources that included the Oxford Group, William James, and Lois Wilson, whose family religion was a New Thought forerunner.

Is there truth in the old adage that money can't buy happiness? Does one become overly competitive in chasing the American dream?

November 25 – *Before I can live with other folks, I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience.*
Harper Lee 1926-2016

Writers dream of penning "The Great American Novel." The candidates for that trophy would include Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, Hemingway, Faulkner, Franzen and others. Any such list would almost certainly include Harper Lee who authored *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Lee referred to herself as a slow worker but a steady one.

In North American society, there's a lot of "jumping on bandwagons." A thing becomes popular and it seems like everybody wants to do it. Many of those crazes have had devastating effects. Junk food became hugely popular and has contributed to the obesity problem in general, and more particularly, to childhood obesity. There has been no wisdom in the majority's decisions on this. We have yet to scratch the surface of the health problems that might result from "energy drinks." Tobacco is the classic example of a bad decision made by the majority of people. Not so long ago, it seemed as if *everyone* smoked cigarettes. Conforming is easy, while following one's conscience can be quite difficult, especially when it calls for taking a minority position. The person who lobbies for protecting the environment gets shouted down by all the folks not wanting to pay higher taxes.

Many with addiction problems took the earliest steps of that journey in response to peer pressure. The desire to fit in, to not be seen as fearful or different, led to many first cigarettes, first beers, and first joints. Lee points out that such decisions that run counter to the voice of conscience, come with consequences. Internal ones. Ironically, those proceeding into heavy use of booze or drugs enjoy the conscience-numbing effect.

As an addict, were many of your actions in opposition to the dictates of conscience? Did lying go from harmless to abhorrent? Does your inner voice nag you when you've done something wrong?

November 26 – *Heaven is not reached by a single bound. But we build a ladder by which we rise.*
– J.G. Holland

AA's slogans, and indeed adages from other sources, can sound trite. "Rome wasn't built in a day." Well, of course it wasn't. *First Things First* "can be tossed off without much feeling or understanding. But it deserves more than that. It expresses the important principle of orderly progress. Order is so essential that Alexander Pope even called it 'Heav'n's first law.'" (7 Key Principles of Successful Recovery, Mel B. & Bill P., p. 2)

In the words of both Alexander Pope and J.G. Holland, "heaven" could have a variety of meanings. In recovery, it can mean the calmness of mind that comes when the voice that screams for intoxication shrinks to a whisper. Even then, it pays to stay alert to the danger of overconfidence and complacency.

"Instant gratification and dreams of overnight success both go hand in hand with alcoholism... Though we probably had many warnings that we were disorderly in our approach to life, we did not heed them... We must first face the fact that drinking and other compulsive behaviors have been false, self-defeating attempts at the kinds of feelings and success we can get only by right thinking and the right kinds of actions." (7 Key Principles, pp. 2-3)

Alcoholics have some experience in the practice of putting first things first. Our consuming drive to drink brushed away all that got in the way of that. Now is the time to put sobriety first. A wise oldtimer told me not to be seeking balance in the early stages of recovery. Balance could become a focus later on. People with long term recovery almost always had put AA first, to the point of imbalance in the earliest months.

Do I have the patience to build a ladder? Am I expecting too much too soon? Am I a seeker of instant gratification? Do I continue to keep sobriety as a high priority?

November 27 – *When you're not used to being confident, confidence feels like arrogance. When you're used to being passive, assertiveness feels like aggression. When you're not used to getting your needs met, prioritizing yourself feels selfish. Your comfort zone is not a good benchmark.*
Dr Vassilia Binensztok

People of various types need to exit their comfort zones. Otherwise, if nothing changes, nothing changes. In many ways, recovery is about moving towards the middle. The meek need to develop confidence and that is going to feel very different from what they have become used to. The shy need to learn to speak up and the loquacious and the confident need to speak less. Whatever the former comfort zone was, we want to move on from there to something new.

I used to be somewhat withdrawn but, from time to time, frustration and anger would drive me to aggressiveness. If you'd have asked me if I needed assertiveness training I'd have said "Definitely not!" Nevertheless, I was wrong. Assertive people can express their wants, needs, and dissatisfaction without having a fit. Folks who've been doormats and dishrags feel uncomfortable when they start to speak up for themselves, even a little bit. That same discomfort comes when they raise the priority of their own needs. As Beth Aich points out in *We're Not All Egomaniacs*, a great many people need something other than the ego deflation that is critical for the Bill W. type.

Many might benefit from a look into codependency, a condition far more widespread than was once thought. Transitions of almost any sort come with a certain amount of discomfort. The comfort zone is so named for good reason. It's both comfortable and familiar. I don't think anyone's goal should be to have zero selfishness—I think recovery is about finding balance. In some sense we target a middle ground.

Do I need to be more or less assertive? More or less selfish? More or less confident? Do I cling to the hope that I can stay in my comfort zone and still get better?

bob's newest book, *Daily Reflections for Practical 12 Step Recovery*, will soon be published and available on Amazon.

Of course he has written two other books which are quite popular and also available on Amazon: [Key Players in AA History](#) and [The Secret Diaries of Bill W.](#)
