

Continuously Avoiding Continued



By Richard W. Clark

There are tens-of-thousands of inspirational quotes to be found on-line and in books innumerable and these have certainly been one of the shallow fascinations of people searching for an easier, softer way. Some people memorize pithy Big Book sentences, then announce them sincerely at AA clan gatherings, and ignore them at the first non-scrutinized opportunity. It is evident that some people cover the walls of their mind with these questionable inspirations and remain mediocre.

After being sincerely involved in studying religions for several decades, having lived in both Christian and Buddhist monasteries, and reading serious literature (both fiction and non-fiction) for over sixty years, what seems to be consistent is that 'inspirational quotes' can be impressive approaches to accomplishing nothing. It's too easily assumed that a quoter of these quotes is a deep thinker rather than a good memorizer.

Pithy rejoinders are not evidence of integrity. This is often evident in listening to people talk about letting go of resentments which is reported to be one goal of stable recovery. Letting go of resentments is something to be achieved — and for a few people letting them go is a notable achievement. However, to create an awareness of a deeper responsibility here, I'll begin with the basics, and yes, this is over-simplified.

For people who attend meetings, there are only two and a half ways of approaching recovery. The first is the Bill Wilson, God-prayer-forgiveness model initiated in 1939. A person may not necessarily become recovered but certainly being sober and belonging to the crowd of good Christians is considered a major improvement over being drunk, and it is a remarkable improvement. The second way is completely psychological, or maybe

better said, being the atheist-agnostic version of recovery — the psychological approach. The third half-way choice is to try and straddle the line doing both religion and psychology and deciding to be undecided. We know from another pithy observation: half measures availed us nothing. This last way often leads to subtle insecurity and emotional chaos. My experience of these three alternatives is with wise council, the atheist-agnostic approach is by far the better choice. (I will explain clearly why this is true in a future submission.)

Prior to 1990 there were two categories of steps. Discussions were of the transformational steps (the first nine) or the maintenance steps (the last three). The last three were approached quite differently from the first nine. What's more, Bill Wilson promised that near the end of Step Nine certain promises would appear in the lives of sober alcoholics that were the specific reward of Step 9. However, as regards his promises, there are two preconditions: painstaking and thorough.

The promises begin at p. 81 of Alcoholics Anonymous, '...know a new freedom and a new happiness' through to the last one, '...we will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.' These promises are psychological. The last line of that paragraph '...realize that God is doing for us...' is a realization for believers not a promise. Promises and realizations are different. Addicts who choose agnostic-atheist recovery should understand that the promises, which are not dependant on God, indicate the addict has achieved a certain psychological stability that appears as the result of hard work. It is rarely observed that the promises are immediately followed by the maintenance steps. [[Spiritual Transformation](#), by Richard W. Clark, has an in-depth description of the psychology of the promises.]

Maintenance, as with any complicated mechanical thing like sewing machines or cars, is to keep things running smoothly. The design of the maintenance steps is to advance or deepen a newfound level of honesty or compassion and kindness. Maintenance has fallen to disfavor in recent years because of the now-present assumption that everyone will relapse. Starting over, ad-nauseum, is the order of the day. One does not need maintenance if one is either forever in recovery (there's nothing to maintain) or forever relapsing into unsavory defective behaviour (forever starting over). It is impossible to overstate the importance of 'mental maintenance' regarding the five spiritual principles. When finished with the first nine steps, living sincerely in maintenance is what being recovered means. 'Being recovered' doesn't indicate perfection of character, it means being successful in the hour-by-hour or day-by-day routine of personality maintenance offered in Steps 10, 11, and 12.

As much as the significant majority of Bill Wilson's writing is religious proselytizing and should be ignored as regards mental health, he did provide an accidental glimmer of wisdom regarding resentments. From Step Four and other sundry inferences, resentments are emotionally dangerous to a recovering addict. Fair enough and quite true. It would seem then, that resentments should be avoided... but the common presentation is letting them go, as they crop up let them go, get a resentment then let it go. What is missed in this repetitive inadequacy is the overwhelming presence of second-

best recovery where one ignores the neatly hidden guide to avoiding resentments from appearing... but so few of us read with contemplation.

When the maintenance steps are clearly understood and applied without religious speculation, which is hard enough for most of us, even committed atheists, Step 10 is quite unique in the annals of self-help. Step 10 is quite clear that it is 'continuous.' We breathe and our hearts beat continuously. Continued to take personal inventory is clearly not two or three times a day or late in the evening. Why continuous? Because within Step 10, wrongs are to be promptly admitted. An inventory being continuous is what allows for promptly addressing any wrong. The spiritual goal here is to be prompt in making amends so the reflection on possible wrongs must be frequent. A continuous inventory may be one of the four or five most continuously ignored instructions from Mr. Wilson. Spiritual irresponsibility is continuously avoiding continued.

Assuming self-reflection is continuous and prompt, only then does Step Eleven meditation on the wisdom of others in relation to 'wrong' become of benefit. Regular meditation, based on the wisdom of others, should lead to an understanding of why we were so resentful or annoyed and rude in the first place. Being harshly judgemental or having an unexamined sense of entitlement, or not being compassionate; being an angry victim and blaming others, often motivate rudeness or callousness that warrants an amend being required. Step Eleven meditation is not to invoke God's forgiveness when one is callous. The continuous self-examinations at Step 10 and subsequent meditations are to develop self-discipline and forestall callous rudeness or aggression. This, over the long term, eliminates resentments from arising and then three things become evident: one is a confidence in being able to calmly manage emotional situations, another is the realization that wrongs and amends become rare necessities, and kindness or compassion towards others become a graceful part of our character.

A similar observation is made about Buddhism — the assumption that Buddhist doctrine is to let resentments go. This is a second-best misapplication of what Siddhartha Gautama intended. The unspecified benefit of psychological recovery, of not becoming resentful rather than constantly having to let it go, is one of the dynamics of original Buddhist discipline before it became contaminated by religion.

In non-religious Buddhism and advanced psychological recovery, this game of being resentful and then 'letting go' of resentments or defects arises from the carry-over from dysfunctional religious doctrine. Constantly 'letting go' means and implies that serenity can never be achieved because we are in the turmoil of always creating resentments, then realizing we have them, and then we must conduct some repetitive exercise (like prayer, surrender, and forgiveness) to let them go — wash, rinse, repeat. That's not serenity, it's a never-ending cycle of turmoil.

When character and consciousness — how they work in addiction — are understood in an addicted mind-set, all this repetitive chaos is optional. The achievement of the mental state of nirvana (serenity) is what Siddhartha Gautama taught in Buddhism's very brief initial phase: a psychology of compassionate mind. Bill Wilson, without knowing it, gave

us the very vague possibility of achieving this in recovery, albeit hidden under religious chaos and contradictions. He attempted to eliminate the cycle of 'get a resentment-letting go-get a resentment-letting go.' That's tiresome and there are mental disciplines to eliminate this cycle. It begins with the word continued.

Siddhartha Gautama offered a way to achieve compassionate serenity that has been lost and buried under 22 centuries of religious speculation. His was the first cleanly atheist version of achieving psychological serenity. Bill Wilson hinted at a similar thing in his maintenance steps, but again, the nascent psychology was buried under religious self-deprecation and speculation.

These have been recurring awarenesses for me. Kind regards...

Richard Clark has been clean and sober since 22 Sep 1980. He got involved in AA because of the wisdom of an old-timer (In 1980 Gord B. had been sober since 1952), Richard was very open about his atheism and those men and women welcomed him in 'as is'. He's been sober since then with no relapses. He has started two agnostic meetings that still operate and has been a therapist in addictions work since 1984. Richard maintains a private practise with clients all across Canada and is active in his weekly agnostic meeting. He has written three books and is presently writing a fourth book for addiction counsellors and then another one on the modern practise of recovery in Buddhism (atheist version). And here is a website with more information: [Green Room Lectures](#).

