

Belief in Recovery...



By Darcy B.

Alcoholics Anonymous and its 12-Step approach place significant emphasis on belief in a power greater than oneself locating the source of recovery outside the individual. I take a different view.

I believe the power to recover resides within us. During active addiction, that capacity is often buried, obscured, or inaccessible, and recovery begins when it is consciously located, reclaimed, and nurtured. The key to this is **belief**. I believe that **what** we believe is far less important than **how** we believe. The object of belief matters only insofar as it is something we can genuinely commit to. It is the way belief is held, its depth and conviction, that drives the changes necessary for long term sobriety and recovery. Without conviction, belief has little practical effect.

From this perspective, whether one believes recovery depends on a higher power or on strength within oneself is less important than whether that belief leads to meaningful action. It is my belief that meaningful action in the context of recovery, is change. It is the sustained effort to think, behave, and respond differently.

For me, change begins with vision. A clear vision provides a reference point to work toward. It establishes the context, or destination, of what a successful change journey might look like. My vision begins with the words, "In my final days, I can look back at my life and know the following..." With an endpoint defined, we can begin to build a roadmap. We can identify obstacles we are likely to face, examine weaknesses that need strengthening, and recognize strengths that can be further leveraged. From there, we decide what comes next. I believe in taking a first step toward change, then stopping to assess whether that step has moved us closer to the endpoint, sideways, or backward. If necessary, we adjust, take the next step, and repeat the process.

So how do I assess progress? I use the concept of integrity in a very practical way. I am living with integrity when what I believe, think, say, and do are aligned in everything I do. When I feel

ill at ease with something, it is usually because that alignment has been lost. My actions or words may no longer reflect my thinking, or my thinking may no longer be aligned with my beliefs. Regardless of the source, the discomfort is a signal that something needs to be addressed. That becomes my next step. Then I reassess and repeat the process.

The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous offer another mechanism for change. The first three steps focus on acceptance and willingness, while steps four through twelve address the work of change itself. Their value lies in the structure and accountability they provide, not in where the source of power is located. When engaged with conviction, the steps can support meaningful change whether one frames that belief in terms of a higher power or personal responsibility.

No single framework works for everyone. Different people require different structures, languages, and points of entry to engage in meaningful change. What matters is not the specific model being used, but whether it provides enough clarity, discipline, and accountability to support sustained change. For some, the structure of the 12 Steps provides that foundation. For others, a different approach may be more honest and effective. The value of any framework lies not in what it asks us to believe, but in whether it helps us change how we live.

For me, integrity with oneself matters more than adherence to any particular model. Change breaks down quickly when it is built on language or beliefs that are not aligned with what we think or feel. When we say things we do not believe, or commit to ideas we quietly reject, that alignment is lost from the start. Over time, that loss of integrity shows up in our actions. Recovery requires a level of integrity that allows us to acknowledge what is true for us, even when that truth is uncomfortable. Without that integrity, no framework, regardless of how well designed, can sustain meaningful change.

Recovery is not a question of which belief system is correct, but of whether belief is held with enough conviction to drive change. The power to recover does not come from the object of belief, but from the willingness to act on it honestly and consistently. Change requires vision, effort, and continual assessment, guided by integrity and grounded in what is true for us. When belief leads to meaningful action, and when action is aligned with what we believe, think, say, and do, recovery becomes possible. Different paths may lead there, but the work remains the same.

Darcy attended his first AA meeting in 1989 and entered treatment in 1990. It would take another 21 years before he reached his final breaking point and it was in the summer of 2011 that he admitted he was an alcoholic and made sobriety his top priority.

Over time, he embraced his agnostic beliefs and developed a personal approach to recovery rooted in the idea that the strength to stay sober comes from within, while remaining connected to the AA and recovery community for support when needed.

Darcy is the father of three and a proud grandfather of four. He has a lifelong passion for music and spends much of his free time designing and building guitars.
