

Powerlessness. Are we really powerless over People, Places and Things?

As it seems inevitable that AA meetings, and ultimately AA practices are becoming diluted with other philosophies let me assure you that as long as we have people RECOVERED from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body through working, taking, doing, practicing, sharing and living the 12 Steps of AA we can thwart the dilution process by remaining vigilant and speak up in meetings by teaching our protégés (not pigeons....that's disgusting) the differences between REAL AA and the other outside influences. Powerless over People, Places and Things is just one of these un-truisms shared in meetings and will probably be around as long as there are white-knuckled, restless, irritable and discontented, don't drink and go to meetings people with sodryity (Dry drunks) around, not in, the fellowship of AA. What I am really trying to say here is the ones in the fellowship of the meetings, not the Fellowship of the Spirit who are leading and living a now productive Happy, Joyous and Free life of sobriety.

What's the point? The point is that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The point is that powerless over People, Places and Things is NOT AA. It has drifted into our meetings from treatment centers, group therapy, and 12 step fellowships other than AA. Psycho-babble heard from "wet behind the ears" newcomers coming straight from treatment centers because they were told to go to AA as well as well seasoned veterans only sharing what they have heard and not from their personal experience. This type of sharing has been infiltrating AA since its early days and if the old-timers of today do not speak up we will soon be headed for AA (Addictions Anonymous) and that would be a travesty for those who have recovered and those who have yet to grace the rooms. Let me put a disclaimer in here. It is not some of the old-timers fault.

That is all they were taught and all they know because that is all their sponsors were taught or knew. If they had a sponsor at all. AA is a spiritual program of action by continuously (day to day – 24 hours at a time) living the 12 steps by Trusting God, Cleaning house and Helping others. My kids and grandkids have a very good predisposition of needing AA in the future because as far as I can see we are not going to have another prohibition in the near future. I want AA to remain AA in the future so those future alcoholics have the same opportunity I have. The real Program of Action cannot become a thing of the past, a memory of what was and could have been.

According to the Big Book of AA “powerless over alcohol” means we have lost the freedom of choice when it comes to drinking. Nowhere in AA literature does it say that we’ve lost the freedom of choice over People, Places or Things. Through my experience, as well as others’ experiences who I have consulted while doing this research, I have reasoned that with my sobriety comes the power to choose who I associate with (stick with the winners), where I go (to meetings or other functions and not to a bar or other sordid places), and what I do or what I buy (No is a complete sentence). Hence, while I am absolutely powerless over alcohol, I am not at all powerless over People, Places or Things. Today that choice is mine. I do not have control over People, Places and Things and that is a big difference between powerlessness. Are you ready for this next statement? If I do not remain powerless over alcohol and give alcohol the power over me by taking a drink I immediately, if not sooner, am now powerless over people, places and things because I have just given all my power back to alcohol and all of my surroundings. And because of this relapse of thinking before I took that drink all bets are off and I do not have any more power than a dead car battery.

Now, because I do have the power of choice today my emotions can still get up-ended and I might choose to give my power away. That is my choice and a painful one at that. When this happens, and it still does, if I don't practice restraint and humility, I get resentful, restless, irritable and discontented with that Person, Place or Thing for my giving them my power. When these crop up my only defense comes from my Higher Power and practicing steps 8,9, 10 and 11. Quite frankly, I do not like to take my own inventory and make amends when necessary. That's just my nature. Here is the big fat DUH!! When I am spiritually fit I can catch myself before I say or do something I later regret. This daily practice of steps 7 and 10 has given me even more freedom and the power of choice how to respond, instead of react, to People, Places and Things that attempt to knock me off the AA beam and back to my old way of living and thinking.

The only reasons people say they are powerless over People, Places and Things is because they have heard it in a meeting and they see the bobble-heads going off in agreement and know that if they say it too they will get the same reaction. I know, because it was just that way with me until I was confronted by my sponsor who quickly and swiftly corrected me in my pontification after a meeting. He told me he needed AA without the influences of outside sources. I had no clue what he meant at the time, but I can assure you I know now. It all comes down to education of what's in the book and what's not in the book. Though confusion between control and acceptance versus powerlessness is somewhat a fine line.....It is not. Acceptance means learning to live with a problem we cannot change. ie: alcoholism. People, Places and Things are all changeable. Is that simple or what? So we have to accept our alcoholism and feel free enough to change everything else. This can only be done with a constant and improving

relationship with our Higher Power, or our own conception of God, or Spirit of the Universe, or Great Reality, or Power greater than ourselves, or God, or Sunlight of the Spirit (you get the picture). Only that Power other than ourselves, can give us that NEW sense of Power, that NEW sense of direction. After all, in order to be recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body all we have to change is everything. Right? Does entire psychic change mean some change or entire change? Hopefully, the next time you say or think you are powerless over People, Places and Things and you feel like playing the victim once again just remember that this is the road to being recovered, it is NOT a negative defeatist attitude of pending doom.

Let's look at some references from our literature. "We have been given the power to reason" (BB P53). Is that powerless over things? "We have been given the power to help others" (BB P132). Is that powerless over people? "We can do all sorts of things (or go to places) alcoholics are not supposed to do (or go)" (BB Pgs100-101). Is that powerless over places and things? By the way, and think about this. If we are powerless over People, Places and Things there would be no reason to compile a list of Persons We Have Harmed and no need to make the necessary amends. No use to learn humility because we can just chalk it up to being powerless over everything. What a cop out, excuse, rationalization and justification that I do have the choice of using if I want to remain sick, restless, irritable and discontent. We alcoholics have plenty of negative results from People, Places and Things and we now have positive action we can take to change those situations, The Steps. Do you want to live a life of negativity or begin to live a life positively charged by acceptance, forgiveness and helping others?

The Big Book only uses the word powerless once and it is in the 1st step and specifically, and only, in reference to our unique relationship with alcohol. This phrase of powerless over People, Places and Things might come indirectly (not verbatim) from a personal story in the back of the Big Book. The story: Acceptance was the answer: “When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation – some fact of my life – unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment.” (BB P417). The personal stories come after the basic text of the Big Book and it is clearly stated on Page 29: “Each individual, in the personal stories, describes in his own language and from his own point of view the way he established his relationship with God”. That is the purpose of the stories and are not meant to be used as instruction. The instructions (recipe) for taking the steps of The Program of Action are in the first 103 pages.

As hard-headed and set in my ways as I was I found the only recourse I had was to accept Spiritual Help and Set Aside everything I thought I knew and follow the dictates of my Higher Power, even though that meant following the dictates of my sponsor because he was happy and I was not. He told me to pray about, meditate on, share and research any experiences I was having with things I heard in meetings that I have resistance to. If I did not understand something or told myself that what those people are saying is total garbage I was having a negative vibe that would fester in my mind and grow into a resentment and I would quit listening at that point and miss the good stuff because at that point I quit remaining teachable and that I would certainly be drinking by this time Thursday next. That gave me enough motivation to continue on this vigorous course of action.

In summary, powerless over People, Places and Things is NOT AA. It is a diluted adaptation of other 12 step fellowships, treatment centers, uninformed newcomers, old-timers who don't know anything else, and lack of Twelfth Step work in our rooms today. Bobble-heads in meetings are NOT always a good thing so don't be a follower and be a Leader. Leaders lead and followers follow until they too have a spiritual experience and feel that, with God's help, they are now ready to lead. Remember, "We cannot transmit something we haven't got" and "You will surely meet SOME of us as we trudge the road to Happy Destiny".

Powerless over Alcohol.....Not the entire world. "Relax, take it easy, don't struggle"

Greg P, Huntington, WV