

STEP ONE
The Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Aspects of Alcoholism.

The following are Big Book references (along with commentary) that describe our basic text's description of the three-fold disease called alcoholism. Page numbers are from the Fourth Edition. - Barefoot Bill

The Physical Craving

Page xxvi:2 - "The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture MUST believe- that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind. It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, ANY picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is INCOMPLETE. The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account."

The word allergy means "an abnormal reaction to any food, liquid or substance."

The alcoholic's abnormal reaction to alcohol is a craving for more alcohol once they take a few drinks. This craving NEVER happens to a non-alcoholic. Because of this, the non-alcoholic (about 88% of the population) can ALWAYS predict how much they are going to drink, but the alcoholic (about 12% of the population) CANNOT. Besides the craving, alcohol DOES something for an alcoholic that it does NOT do for a non-alcoholic. When an ALCOHOLIC drinks, they get a feeling of ease and comfort; an "IN control, get up and go into town, I like this so I want more" kind of a feeling. When a NON-alcoholic drinks, they get an "OUT of control, beginning of a nauseating, slightly tipsy, I don't like this so I don't want any more" kind of a feeling. That's why they stop after one or two, and make statements like, "I don't want another drink because I am feeling that first one." The NON-alcoholic's relationship with alcohol is a "take it or leave it" kind of relationship, but an ALCOHOLIC'S relationship with alcohol is a "I need it to deal with life" kind of relationship. They are having a COMPLETELY difference experience than we are having.

Page xxviii:1 - "We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is LIMITED to this class and NEVER occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can NEVER safely use alcohol IN ANY FORM AT ALL; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things HUMAN, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve. Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices. The message which can interest and hold these alcoholic people MUST have depth and weight. In nearly ALL cases, their ideals MUST be grounded in a power greater than themselves, IF they are to re-create their lives."

Since this was written in the late 1930's, there was no metabolism research at the time, which is why Dr. Silkworth refers to it as "the phenomenon of craving." A phenomenon is something that you can see but can't explain. I hope you noticed that this "well-known doctor, chief physician at a nationally prominent hospital specializing in alcoholic and drug addiction," with nine years experience when this letter was written, points out that we alcoholics are beyond human aid. Like it says in How It Works, "Probably NO HUMAN POWER can relieve our alcoholism."

Page xxviii:4 - "Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks-drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.

On the other hand-and strange as this may seem to those who do not understand-once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol, the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules."

I will be including this in all three aspects of alcoholism because it touches upon them all. Although this starts by saying "men and women", you can tell as the paragraph continues that he is referring to alcoholics only. There are three references here to the physical feature of alcoholism. The first is that we like the effect produced by alcohol, and the second is that we experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by talking a few drinks (like it was said earlier, non-alcoholics do NOT like the effect produced by alcohol, which is why they only have one or two drinks and then stop; AND, why they do not have any problem staying away from alcohol if it causes problems in their life). It also says that after the alcoholic has succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a drinking spree (as THE result of an allergy or abnormal reaction to drinking alcohol).

Page xxix:4 - "I do not hold with those who believe that alcoholism is entirely a problem of mental control. I have had many men who had, for example, worked a period of months on some problem or business deal which was to be settled on a certain date, favorably to them. They took a drink a day or so prior to the date, and THEN the phenomenon of craving at once became paramount to all other interests so that the important appointment was not met. These men were not drinking to escape; they were drinking to overcome a craving beyond their mental control."

They may have STARTED drinking to escape, but after they set off the craving for more alcohol by taking a few drinks, they then missed the important appointment because of their unsatisfied craving for alcohol, not because they started off by wanting to escape for a few hours.

Page xxx:4 - "All these (the classifications of alcoholics described in the two previous paragraphs in the Big Book), and many others, have ONE symptom in common: they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving. This phenomenon, as we have suggested, may be the manifestation of an allergy which differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity. It has NEVER been, by ANY treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated. The ONLY relief we have to suggest is ENTIRE abstinence."

Page 7:1 - "I met a kind doctor who explained that though certainly selfish and foolish, I had been seriously ill, bodily and mentally."

Page 21:1 - "But what about the real alcoholic? He may start off as a moderate drinker; he may or may not become a continuous hard drinker; but at some stage of his drinking career he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption, once he starts to drink."

Page 22:4 - "We know that while the alcoholic keeps away from drink, as he may do for months or years, he reacts much like other men. We are equally positive that once he takes any alcohol whatever into his system, something happens, both in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for him to stop. The experience of any alcoholic will abundantly confirm this."

Page 30:1 - "Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death."

Page 44:1 - "In the preceding chapters you have learned something of alcoholism. We hope we have made clear the distinction between the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic. If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which ONLY a spiritual experience will conquer."

The following is an explanation of what happens when alcoholics put alcohol into their bodies, and how it is a completely different experience compared to non-alcoholics. No wonder why non-alcoholics can't relate, and make statements like, "Can't you just stop after one or two drinks?" It shows why alcoholics can use their willpower against everything EXCEPT alcohol.

Alcoholics make up about 12% of the population. The body of the alcoholic is physically different than the body of someone who is not an alcoholic. The liver and pancreas of the alcoholic process alcohol at one-third to one-tenth the rate of a normal pancreas and liver. As alcohol enters the body, it breaks down into its various components, one of which is acetate. We know now that acetate triggers a craving for more acetate. In a normal drinker, the acetate moves quickly through the system and exits. But that doesn't happen in an alcoholic. In alcoholics, the acetate of the first drink is barely processed out, so by staying in their body, it triggers a craving for more acetate. The alcoholic then has a second drink, now adding to most of the acetate of the first drink, and that makes them want a drink twice as much as the normal drinker. So they have another. Then, having almost three times the craving as a normal drinker, they have another. You can see from that point how alcoholics have no control over how much they drink. The craving cycle has begun and they have no choice but to keep drinking. Once the acetate accumulates in their body, and that begins to happen with only ONE drink, they will crave another. And how many times does an alcoholic think it would be nice to have JUST ONE drink to relax, but has many more? Now you see why. AND THIS CAN NEVER CHANGE!

On top of THAT (like it's not bad enough already), alcohol is a poison because it destroys human tissue. The two organs that alcohol damages the most are the liver and the pancreas. So the more the alcoholic drinks as time passes (or doesn't drink, because the liver and pancreas also deteriorate naturally as we age), the less their body is able to process the acetate. THAT is why alcoholism is a progressive, fatal illness. The Big Book says on page 30, "We are convinced to a man that alcoholics of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, NEVER better." Pretty revealing, huh. It explains many things I never before understood.

But if you think about it, we never have to deal with ANY of this if we DON'T put alcohol into our bodies in the first place. So the MAIN problem of the alcoholic centers in their mind and in their spiritual condition. My mind tells me that it's okay to TAKE the first drink and doesn't see that what I'm about to do is harmful (otherwise known as the alcoholic's mental obsession or our powerlessness, even while not drinking), and if I'm NOT spiritually fit, I can't STAND being sober because my thinking and emotions

are too uncomfortable (otherwise known as the spiritual malady or our unmanageability). So whether they're drinking or not an alcoholic is powerless over alcohol, because of the mind and the body; and their life is unmanageable, especially their INNER life, because of their spiritual condition. Coincidentally, the Steps deal DIRECTLY and EFFECTIVELY with both our spiritual condition and with the mental obsession. BUT, the way the alcoholic's body handles alcohol will ONLY get worse as time passes (whether they are currently drinking or not), so there is NOTHING we can do about the physical feature of alcoholism except staying away from the first drink.

So that's the simple definition of what it means to be an alcoholic - we can't handle DRINKING (because of the mental obsession and the physical allergy) and we can't handle NOT drinking (because of the spiritual malady).

The Mental Obsession

Page xxvi:2 - "The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture MUST believe- that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind. It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, ANY picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is INCOMPLETE."

Page xxviii:4 - "Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks-drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.

On the other hand-and strange as this may seem to those who do not understand-once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol, the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules."

Again, although this starts by saying "men and women", you can tell as the paragraph continues that he is referring to alcoholics only. Since alcohol brings about ease and comfort for the alcoholic (which it DOESN'T do for the non-alcoholic) we succumb (which means "to give in") to the desire again and again even though alcohol has caused problems for us in the past. We DON'T see what alcohol is doing TO us, we ONLY think about what it is going to do FOR us. The NON-alcoholic's relationship with alcohol is a "take it or leave it" kind of relationship, but an ALCOHOLIC'S relationship with alcohol is a "I need it to deal with life" kind of relationship.

Page 5:1 - "Liquor ceased to be a luxury; it became a necessity. "Bathtub" gin, two bottles a day, and often three, got to be routine. Sometimes a small deal would net a few hundred dollars, and I would pay my bills at the bars and delicatessens. This went on endlessly, and I began to waken very early in the morning shaking violently. A tumbler full of gin followed by half a dozen bottles of beer would be required if I were to eat any breakfast. Nevertheless, I still thought I could control the situation, and there were periods of sobriety which renewed my wife's hope.

Gradually things got worse. The house was taken over by the mortgage holder, my mother-in-law died, my wife and father-in-law became ill.

Then I got a promising business opportunity. Stocks were at the low point of 1932, and I had somehow formed a group to buy. I was to share generously in the profits. Then I went on a prodigious bender, and that chance vanished.

I woke up. This had to be stopped. I saw I could not take so much as one drink. I was through forever. Before then, I had written lots of sweet promises, but my wife happily observed that this time I meant business. And so I did.

Shortly afterward I came home drunk. There had been no fight. Where had been my high resolve? I simply didn't know. It hadn't even come to mind. Someone had pushed a drink my way, and I had taken it. Was I crazy? I began to wonder, for such an appalling lack of perspective seemed near being just that.

Renewing my resolve, I tried again. Some time passed, and confidence began to be replaced by cocksureness. I could laugh at the gin mills. Now I had what it takes! One day I walked into a cafe to telephone. In no time I was beating on the bar asking myself how it happened. As the whisky rose to my head I told myself I would manage better next time, but I might as well get good and drunk then. And I did."

Willpower and "thinking the drink through" is not enough.

Page 6:2 - "There were flights from city to country and back, as my wife and I sought escape."

No matter where you go, there you are. Where you live is not the problem. Your unmanageable inner condition and your mind telling you that having a drink will help you with that - THAT is your problem.

Page 7:1 - "I met a kind doctor who explained that though certainly selfish and foolish, I had been seriously ill, bodily and mentally. It relieved me somewhat to learn that in alcoholics the will is amazingly weakened when it comes to combating

liquor, though it often remains strong in other respects. My incredible behavior in the face of a desperate desire to stop was explained. Understanding myself now, I fared forth in high hope. For three or four months the goose hung high. I went to town regularly and even made a little money. Surely this was the answer self-knowledge. But it was not, for the frightful day came when I drank once more.”

Page 21:2 – “He has a positive genius for getting tight at exactly the wrong moment, particularly when some important decision must be made or engagement kept. He is often perfectly sensible and well balanced concerning everything except liquor, but in that respect he is incredibly dishonest and selfish.”

Page 22:0 – “Then comes the day when he simply cannot make it and gets drunk all over again.”

Page 22:2 – “Why does he behave like this? If hundreds of experiences have shown him that one drink means another debacle with all its attendant suffering and humiliation, why is it he takes that one drink? Why can't he stay on the water wagon? What has become of the common sense and will power that he still sometimes displays with respect to other matters?”

Page 22:4 – “We know that while the alcoholic keeps away from drink, as he may do for months or years, he reacts much like other men. We are equally positive that once he takes any alcohol whatever into his system, something happens, both in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for him to stop. The experience of any alcoholic will abundantly confirm this.

These observations would be academic and pointless if our friend never took the first drink, thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. Therefore, the main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body. If you ask him why he started on that last bender, the chances are he will offer you any one of a hundred alibis. Sometimes these excuses have a certain plausibility, but none of them really makes sense in the light of the havoc an alcoholic's drinking bout creates. They sound like the philosophy of the man who, having a headache, beats himself on the head with a hammer so that he can't feel the ache. If you draw this fallacious reasoning to the attention of an alcoholic, he will laugh it off, or become irritated and refuse to talk.

Once in a while he may tell the truth. And the truth, strange to say, is usually that he has no more idea why he took that first drink than you have. Some drinkers have excuses with which they are satisfied part of the time. But in their hearts they really do not know why they do it. Once this malady has a real hold, they are a baffled lot. There is the obsession that somehow, someday, they will beat the game. But they often suspect they are down for the count.”

Page 24:0 – “At a certain point in the drinking of every alcoholic, he passes into a state where the most powerful desire to stop drinking is of absolutely no avail. This tragic situation has already arrived in practically every case long before it is suspected. The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink. The almost certain consequences that follow taking even a glass of beer do not crowd into the mind to deter us. If these thoughts occur, they are hazy and readily supplanted with the old threadbare idea that this time we shall handle ourselves like other people. There is a complete failure of the kind of defense that keeps one from putting his hand on a hot stove. The alcoholic may say to himself in the most casual way, "It won't burn me this time, so here's how!" Or perhaps he doesn't think at all. How often have some of us begun to drink in this nonchalant way, and after the third or fourth, pounded on the bar and said to ourselves, "For God's sake, how did I ever get started again?" Only to have that thought supplanted by "Well, I'll stop with the sixth drink." Or "What's the use anyhow?"

When this sort of thinking is fully established in an individual with alcoholic tendencies, he has probably placed himself beyond human aid.”

Page 26:1 – “A certain American business man had ability, good sense, and high character. For years he had floundered from one sanitarium to another. He had consulted the best known American psychiatrists. Then he had gone to Europe, placing himself in the care of a celebrated physician (the psychiatrist, Dr. Jung) who prescribed for him. Though experience had made him skeptical, he finished his treatment with unusual confidence. His physical and mental condition were unusually good. Above all, he believed he had acquired such a profound knowledge of the inner workings of his mind and its hidden springs that relapse was unthinkable. Nevertheless, he was drunk in a short time. More baffling still, he could give himself no satisfactory explanation for his fall.

So he returned to this doctor, whom he admired, and asked him point-blank why he could not recover. He wished above all things to regain self-control. He seemed quite rational and well-balanced with respect to other problems. Yet he had no control whatever over alcohol. Why was this?

He begged the doctor to tell him the whole truth, and he got it. In the doctor's judgment he was utterly hopeless; he could never regain his position in society and he would have to place himself under lock and key or hire a bodyguard if he expected to live long. That was a great physician's opinion.

But this man still lives, and is a free man. He does not need a bodyguard nor is he confined. He can go anywhere on this earth where other men may go without disaster, provided he remains willing to maintain a certain simple attitude.

Some of our alcoholic readers may think they can do without spiritual help. Let us tell you the rest of the conversation our friend had with his doctor.

The doctor said: "You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen one single case recover, where that state of mind existed to the extent that it does in you." Our friend felt as though the gates of hell had closed on him with a clang."

Page 30:1 – "Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death."

Page 34:2 – "For those who are unable to drink moderately the question is how to stop altogether. We are assuming, of course, that the reader desires to stop. Whether such a person can quit upon a non-spiritual basis depends upon the extent to which he has already lost the power to choose whether he will drink or not. Many of us felt that we had plenty of character. There was a tremendous urge to cease forever. Yet we found it impossible. This is the baffling feature of alcoholism as we know it this utter inability to leave it alone, no matter how great the necessity or the wish."

Page 35:1 – "What sort of thinking dominates an alcoholic who repeats time after time the desperate experiment of the first drink? Friends who have reasoned with him after a spree which has brought him to the point of divorce or bankruptcy are mystified when he walks directly into a saloon. Why does he? Of what is he thinking?"

Page 36:2 – "''*Suddenly the thought crossed my mind that if I were to put an ounce of whiskey in my milk it couldn't hurt me on a full stomach. I ordered a whiskey and poured it into the milk. I vaguely sense I was not being any too smart, but I reassured as I was taking the whiskey on a full stomach. The experiment went so well that I ordered another whiskey and poured it into more milk. That didn't seem to bother me so I tried another.*"

Thus started one more journey to the asylum for Jim. Here was the threat of commitment, the loss of family and position, to say nothing of that intense mental and physical suffering which drinking always caused him. *He had much knowledge about himself as an alcoholic. Yet all reasons for not drinking were easily pushed aside in favor of the foolish idea that he could take whiskey if only he mixed it with milk!*

Whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call this plain insanity. How can such a lack of proportion, of the ability to think straight, be called anything else?

You may think this an extreme case. To us it is not far-fetched, for this kind of thinking has been characteristic of every single one of us. We have sometimes reflected more than Jim did upon the consequences. But there was always the curious mental phenomenon that parallel with our sound reasoning there inevitably ran some insanely trivial excuse for taking the first drink. Our sound reasoning failed to hold us in check. The insane idea won out. Next day we would ask ourselves, in all earnestness and sincerity, how it could have happened.

In some circumstances we have gone out deliberately to get drunk, feeling ourselves justified by nervousness, anger, worry, depression, jealousy or the like. But even in this type of beginning we are obliged to admit that our justification for a spree was insanely insufficient in the light of what always happened. We now see that when we began to drink deliberately, instead or casually, there was little serious or effective thought during the period of premeditation of what the terrific consequences might be."

Page 38:3 – "However intelligent we may have been in other respects, where alcohol has been involved, we have been strangely insane."

Page 39:1 – "But the actual or potential alcoholic, with hardly any exception, will be *absolutely unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge.*"

Page 41:2 – "Not only had I been off guard, I had made no fight whatever against the first drink. This time I had not thought of the consequences at all. I had commenced to drink as carelessly as though the cocktails were ginger ale. I now remembered what my alcoholic friends had told me, how they prophesied that if I had an alcoholic mind, the time and place would come - I would drink again. They had said that though I did raise a defense, it would one day give way before some trivial reason for having a drink. Well, just that did happen and more, for what I had learned of alcoholism did not occur to me at all. I knew from that moment that I had an alcoholic mind. I saw that will power and self-knowledge would not help in those strange mental blank spots."

Page 43:3 – "Once more: The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink. Except in a few rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a Higher Power."

Page 44:1 – "In the preceding chapters you have learned something of alcoholism. We hope we have made clear the distinction between the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic. If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when

drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which ONLY a spiritual experience will conquer.”

The Spiritual Malady

Page xxviii:4 – “They are restless (which is that sense that something’s missing), irritable (which means "easily annoyed") and discontented (which means "never satisfied"), unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks.”

Page 15:1 - “...plagued by waves of self-pity and resentment.”

Page 18:1 - “But not so with the alcoholic illness, for with it there goes annihilation of all the things worth while in life. It engulfs all whose lives touch the sufferer's. It brings misunderstanding, fierce resentment, financial insecurity, disgusted friends and employers, warped lives of blameless children, sad wives and parents - anyone can increase the list.”

Page 25: 3 - “We were in a position where life was becoming impossible (sober or not)...go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could (sober or not).”

Page 37:3 - “Nervousness, anger, worry, depression, jealousy or the like.”

Page 52:2 - “We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people - was not a basic solution of these bedevilment's more important than whether we should see newsreels of lunar flight?”

Page 60:4 - “The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, he may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits.

”What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him. Admitting he may be somewhat at fault, he is sure that other people are more to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when trying to be kind? Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things he wants? And do not his actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show? Is he not, even in his best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony?

”Our actor is self-centered - ego-centric, as people like to call it nowadays. He is like the retired businessman who lolls in the Florida sunshine in the winter complaining of the sad state of the nation; the minister who sighs over the sins of the twentieth century; politicians and reformers who are sure all would be Utopia if the rest of the world would only behave; the outlaw safe cracker who thinks society has wronged him; and the alcoholic who has lost all and is locked up. What ever our protestations, are not most of us concerned with ourselves, our resentments, or our self-pity?

”Selfishness – self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt.

”So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so.”

Page 70:1 - “Suppose we fall short of the chosen ideal and stumble? Does this mean we are going to get drunk. Some people tell us so. But this is only a half-truth. It depends on us and on our motives. If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson. If we are not sorry, and our conduct continues to harm others, we are quite sure to drink. We are not theorizing. These are facts out of our experience.”

Page 73:1 - “More than most people, the alcoholic leads a double life. He is very much the actor. To the outer world he presents his stage character. This is the one he likes his fellows to see. He wants to enjoy a certain reputation, but knows in his

heart he doesn't deserve it. The inconsistency is made worse by the things he does on his sprees. Coming to his sense, he is revolted at certain episodes he vaguely remembers. These memories are a nightmare. He trembles to think someone might have observed him. As far as he can, he pushes these memories far inside himself. He hopes they will never see the light of day. He is under constant fear and tension, that makes for (or leads to) more drinking."

Page 82:3 - "The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil."

Page 151:2 - "The less people tolerated us, the more we withdrew from society, from life itself. As we became subjects of King Alcohol, shivering denizens of his mad realm, the chilling vapor that is loneliness settled down. It thickened, ever becoming blacker. Some of us sought out sordid places, hoping to find understanding companionship and approval. Momentarily we did -- then would come oblivion and the awful awakening to face the hideous Four Horsemen -- Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration, Despair. Unhappy drinkers who read this page will understand! Now and then a serious drinker, being dry at the moment says, "I don't miss it at all. Feel better. Work better. Having a better time." As ex-problem drinkers, we smile at such a sally. We know our friend is like a boy whistling in the dark to keep up his spirits. He fools himself. Inwardly he would give anything to take half a dozen drinks and get away with them. He will presently try the old game again, for he isn't happy about his sobriety. He cannot picture life without alcohol. Some day he will be unable to imagine life either with alcohol or without it. Then he will know loneliness such as few do. He will be at the jumping-off place. He will wish for the end. "We have shown how we got out from under. You say, 'Yes, I'm willing. But am I to be consigned to a life where I shall be stupid, boring and glum, like some righteous people I see? I know I must get along without liquor, but how can I? Have you a sufficient substitute?'"

Page 382:2 - "I was inwardly unhappy most of the time. There would be times when the life of respectability and achievement seemed insufferably dull – I had to break out."

Page 383:2 - "The nervous tension had piled up and just had to spill over."

Page 384:1 - "My growing inward unhappiness was a very real thing, however, and I knew that something would have to be done about it."

Page 384:3 - "...it was becoming increasingly hard to maintain my front of distinction and respectability to the world. My personality was stretched almost to splitting in the effort..."

More On The Spiritual Malady

The difference between a problem drinker and an alcoholic is that when the alcohol is taken away from the problem drinker, the problem goes away. But when the alcohol is taken away from the alcoholic, the problem begins.

Once you take alcohol away from an alcoholic, all that's left is the ic (pronounced "ick").

I wanted to be able to have some integrity but I was not who I wanted to be. And this ties back into that seemingly hopeless state of mind & body because what I'm talking about now is discovering some of my own truth. One of the things that I had to finally discover was I do not have the power to be what it is I'd like to be. No matter how much I might wish to be that way, I don't have the power. And the conflict that arises as a result of having the grandest intentions but not having the power to live up to those intentions creates more discomfort than I can bear. And so the alcoholic has no choice but when you get into that conflict, ultimately you have to drink. If my life is lived in such a way that I can't stand it & I don't like the truth about who I am, then I have to have some kind of solution for that, & the solution was simply to drink. It was absolutely necessary to take a drink. The alcoholic mind was just a predisposition to drinking. So the insanity was already there. What I want is oblivion. That's where the dis-ease of alcoholism untreated will carry you to. It's not that I don't want to be HERE, it's that I don't want to be here - anywhere else either. So unless I can experience an entire psychic change, there is little hope that I am ever going to recover. - Jerry E.

If you can't handle drinking & you can't handle not drinking, then AA's for you. - Clancy I.

To recommend just sobriety is just about impossible for an alcoholic. The reason we drink is because we can't stand living sober. It hurts too much - it's too confusing. When I'm filled with self, there's nothing but suffering. - Don P.

Alcohol-ISM: I, Self, Me // I Sponsor Myself // Internal Spiritual Malady (or Maladjustment)// Incredibly Short Memory // InSide Me // I Sabotage Myself.

I learned that the disease of alcoholism affects me physically, mentally & spiritually. Once I crossed the line from problem drinking into alcoholism, then my alcoholism affected me ALL the time - when I was drinking and when I was NOT drinking. It was important to find out that there was a psychological, emotional, spiritual aspect of the disease. It just baffled me because I knew there was something more going on than a drinking problem, and when I walked into AA that's what they told me. They said that my drinking problem was a SYMPTOM, not the PROBLEM. That just startled me that AA told me that drinking was NOT the problem. They said that what we do in AA once we've taken our last drink of alcohol is we use the Twelve Steps of the recovery program of AA to find a different way to live. A way to live that's sufficiently better than the way we lived before so we don't have to go back to drugs or booze to do something for us that we are unwilling or unable to do for ourselves. Because of the way we were living, we had a profound dose of immaturity. If we don't find another way to live, we're going to go back to booze because we don't know how to live without it. I don't know if I've EVER been told a truer thing. Then the discovery I made is that there is an awful lot of people in the rooms of AA who drank an awful lot of booze & I thought that if I EVER had to quit, my life was over. I didn't like people who didn't drink, I didn't like hanging out with them either. Those forced periods of sobriety before AA were pretty tough periods. But I listened to those AA's who worked the Steps &, although they quit drinking, their lives were not over. There was zest, a vitality, an energy & a sense of humor that I've loved ever since I walked into the doors of AA & it started giving me a sense of hope. - Bob B

"Above everything I must be rid of this selfishness. I must or it kills me." Start bringing this up in AA meetings. Ask the question, "What does this mean?" Do you see the connection between this sentence and dying an alcoholic death (mentally & spiritually)? If the SELFISHNESS does not go, it'll create a condition within us called the spiritual malady that is so uncomfortable that at some point in time my mind will remember something that will treat that called alcohol. And I will pick up a drink of alcohol and activate a phenomenon called craving. So this is my problem - my selfishness, my self-centeredness. My name is not in the next sentence, nor is my sponsor's, or my group, or this book (the Big Book): "God makes that possible." That's what you're up against! That's why we spend a lot of time on inventory - to show you what you're up against, that which you don't even KNOW you're up against. Your up against this SELFISHNESS, this

SELF-CENTEREDNESS. It says, "God makes that possible and there often seems no way to get rid of SELF without His aid." I have moral and philosophical convictions galore. I cannot live up to them even though I'd like to. Neither can I reduce my self-centeredness much by wishing and trying on my power. I had to have God's help!" Now I'm starting to get clear on this Third Step decision, aren't I. Now I know why I need this. It hooked me all the way back to that glass of whisky. Do you have to have God's help? Do you understand that those sentences (referring to selfishness and self-centeredness and needing God's help to rid that from me) are tied to a glass of whisky? Do you need God's help? Go into your own experience. Is there anything you've ever been able to do to get rid of your selfishness? No. And that is what I'm going to die from - drunk or sober. Why? Because that isn't how the Universe works, that's why. The Universe works along the will of the CREATOR, not along the will of ME. When I am into selfishness and self-centeredness I am going against how the Universe works - and I will always be in turmoil. ALWAYS. - Mark H.

I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness, I drank - God only knows how often or how much. As a matter of course, my enemies referred the insanity to the drink rather than the drink to the insanity. - Edgar Allan Poe

I am maladjusted to life, in full flight from reality & an outright mental defective (thanks Dr. Silkworth). That means (drinking or not):

Although I look like a full grown adult, I remain childish, grandiose & gravely emotionally immature. As a going human concern, my natural state is one of growing anxiety, depression & fear, coupled with an intense desire for excitement. A condition of being which is exacerbated with & complicated by an obsessive, compulsive, impulsive, excessive, controlling, demanding need for attention, acceptance & unqualified approval. A condition of being which renders me restless, irritable & discontented with life. Mentally, my thought life is controlled by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking & self-pity; all of which drive me to live my life according to selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, inconsiderate, resentful & frightened motives, motives which left unattended in me arouse & engage dangerous & life threatening levels of lust (I try not to make eye contact). Pride, anger, envy, greed, sloth, gluttony, I turn into a pig, I want it all - that renders me emotionally a bit sensitive. Which means I have a strong tendency toward taking everything I see or hear personally. I don't like criticism & I'll be damned if I can stand praise (I don't believe you). When it comes to suffering emotionally, I don't like to suffer emotionally. I don't suffer well & I don't suffer alone. Socially, I'm a bankrupt idealist & brooding perfectionist who lives defensively & guarded in fear of being found out. As such, I tend to rationalize, minimize, justify & deny all of my actions while casting blame upon innocent people in a vigorous attempt to avoid attention. When it comes to my fellow man & woman, I demand the absolute possession & control of everybody & every circumstance that enters my arena of life. My response to you is that I am quick to anger, I'm slow to virtue, & I get a distinct & succinct delight & twisted pleasure out of judging & criticizing everybody I see. My outstanding characteristic is defiance, & rebellion dogs my every step. Now, as a child of God, that is a list of my finer qualities (anybody want a date?). You'll hear this at every meeting you go to, but from newcomers, this is how you hear them: "I don't fit in, I don't belong, I'm not a part of, my God what's wrong with me - I must be different." And the only thing that satisfies that restless, irritable, dissatisfied nature in me is alcohol or drugs. In "A Vision For You" it tells me that there's a sufficient substitute & it is vastly more than that. So I don't have to drink & I don't need to run away anymore. - Wayne B.