

Fellowship Centre Newsletter: December 2022



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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Christmas is not as much about opening our presents as it is about opening our hearts (J. Maeditere)

Merry Christmas Dear Friends.

Many of us feel underwhelmed, let down, or disappointed on or after Christmas. Consider the following quote from the Big Book *Alcoholics Anonymous* to help deal with the emotions that Christmas brings:

"My serenity is inversely proportional to my expectations. The higher my expectations, the lower is my serenity. I can watch my serenity level rise when I discard my expectations. But then my 'rights' try to move in, and they, too, can force my serenity level down. I have to discard my 'rights,' as well as my expectations, by asking myself, How important is it, really? How important is it compared to my serenity, my emotional sobriety? And when I place more value on my serenity and sobriety than on anything else, I can maintain my serenity and sobriety at a higher level - at least for the time being." (p. 452)



<http://cluestolife.wordpress.com/>

Last month's newsletter featured an article entitled *Stinking Thinking Before and After Recovery*. As promised, a follow-up article appears in this month's newsletter providing strategies for changing stinking thinking. As well, this month's Newsletter includes articles on using the slogan to navigate the festive season, mindfulness as a form of meditation (Step 11), Matthew Perry's struggle to get clean, and much more information about the silent auction. Make a bid in early December! You may be the highest bidder and have a valuable item for a fraction of its worth. Thank you to all those members who contributed the valuable items that will be auctioned.



Several items have accumulated at the Centre that people appear to have left behind by mistake. We now have a lost and found box from which you may retrieve the stuff you have left behind. It is close to the entrance door.

TRADITION TWELVE

“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

1. Why is it a good idea for me to place the common welfare of all AA members before individual welfare? What would happen to *me* if AA as a whole disappeared?
2. When I do not trust AA's current servants, who do I wish had the authority to straighten them out?
3. In my opinions of and remarks about other AAs, am I implying membership requirements other than a desire to stay sober?
4. Do I ever try to get a certain AA group to conform to *my* standards, not its own?
5. Have I a personal responsibility in helping an AA group fulfill its primary purpose? What is *my* part?

(Reprinted from Service Material from the General Service Office SM F-131)

STEP TWELVE

“Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

PROMISE TWELVE

“We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.”

TWELFTH STEP PRAYER

Dear God,

My spiritual awakening continues to unfold.

The help I have received I shall pass on & give to others, both in & out of the Fellowship.

For this opportunity I am grateful.

I pray most humbly to continue walking day by day, on the road of spiritual progress.

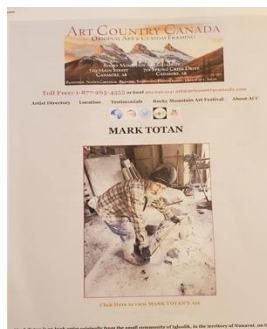
(Alcoholics Anonymous Cleveland)

DECEMBER SILENT AUCTION ITEMS

Items on Display in Starting in Late November: Highest Bidder Contacted on December 10th



December Silent Auction Items Continued



COGNITIVE REFRAMING FOR CHANGING STINKING THINKING

(Part 2 of an article that appeared in last month's newsletter)

Cognitive distortions or stinking thinking are negative or irrational patterns of thinking. When we have intense, negative emotions – such as depression and anxiety – our thoughts are often overly negative. These negative thoughts can intensify and prolong feelings of depression and anxiety. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy of a downwards spiral, negativity can beget further negativity.

Cognitive reframing is a technique for stopping stinking thinking (cognitive distortions.) It is the developed habit of consciously changing how you feel during painful moments of thinking. Through reframing, we learn to recognize our negative thought spirals and practice more realistic and positive thoughts. There are three steps in cognitive reframing:

1. Practice Noticing Your Negative Thinking

Every time you are experiencing a negative thought, point it out to yourself. For example, if you are feeling anxious before you chair a meeting, notice what you are thinking and feeling. Perhaps you think that you are going to say something stupid. You think everyone else is a perfect chairperson and you are the worst chairperson ever. You start to fill your head with negative self-talk, like “I’m stupid. I can’t do anything right.” When you notice yourself thinking something negative like that, stop the thought mid-flow by saying “Stop!” (But not too loud if you are at a meeting). Consider your negative self-talk and see if you can come up with a positive or neutral replacement.

2. Evaluate the Evidence

When you are able, make a list of all the evidence that proves your negative thought and a column of evidence that doesn’t. To continue with our example that you think you are not a good person to chair a meeting, has anyone ever suggested that this is true? Has anyone ever told you that they appreciated your service? Do people generally like your ideas? Have you been successful in other areas of your life? Why would you assume that you are not a good chairperson and that others might think you’re stupid? Where is the evidence for such stinking thinking?

3. Practice Compassion

Speaking kindly to yourself seems simple but making a genuine effort each day to build yourself up and provide your heart and mind with internal love and support is a wonderful habit to make. When getting ready to chair at a meeting, tell yourself: “I’m smart, my sponsor says I’m working a good program, I listen to other people’s shares and benefit from them, I do my morning readings, my higher power speaks through me, and so on. Over time, you will develop more realistic and helpful thoughts.

| |
|--|
| What are you worried about? |
| How likely is it that your worry will come true? Give examples of past experiences, or other evidence, to support your answer. |
| If your worry does come true, what's the worst that could happen? |
| If your worry does come true, what's most likely to happen? |
| If your worry comes true, what are the chances you'll be okay... |
| In one week? _____% In one month? _____% In one year? _____% |

Use the Slogans to Keep from Acting Out over the Holidays

The slogans can help us deal with the emotions that arise over the holidays. For example: **Keep Coming Back:** Going to extra meetings during the months of December and January can make all the difference in getting you through the holiday season. **Easy Does It:** Go easy on yourself during the holidays. **First Things First:** Take care of yourself and your recovery first and foremost during the holidays. **Live and Let Live:** Don't try to force your approach to the holidays on others, and don't allow them to force their



approach on you. **Keep It Simple:** One way to combat holiday stress is to avoid trying to do too much to meet the expectations of others. Keep it simple to deal with Christmas stress. **If Nothing Changes, Nothing Changes:** If we continue living the same old addictive lifestyle, we cannot expect to make much progress as human beings. While engaging in our addictions, we had been pretty skillful at dreaming up alibis, so perhaps when offered an opportunity to act out, we could apply those skills to devising a graceful way of saying, “No, thank you”. **To Thine Own Self Be True:** If you feel nervous about being invited to a holiday party, give

yourself permission to drive separately and leave early. Be true to yourself by honoring your own needs.

One of the most common recovery slogans is **One Day at a Time**. This simple phrase asks us to focus on the present. We cannot see the future and we cannot change the past, but we can control our own actions right now. We must realize that life is a series of moments. While this most prominent of the slogans tells us to take life one day at a time, we often hear members say that they must take life one hour or one minute at a time. Every moment of this holiday season, we must choose to do the next right thing. Continue to focus on what is right in front of you to do. By the time you do it, a new reality will have presented itself to you. This new reality may be easier to deal with than the last, or it may not. Either way, it will last only for a moment and dealing with a moment is quite manageable. Just don't scream at someone, insult someone, abandon, hurt someone, run, binge, act out, and so on. Instead, carefully consider your next move and move quietly toward it.

Let Go and Let God: This slogan reminds us that we cannot control everything. Perhaps we need to find a job or a place to live, but we cannot make these things happen by sheer force of will. We do our part, and then we hope for the best. Those who dislike recovery slogans such as this one often find the word “God” offensive. We must remember, however, that faith is not exclusively religious. We can maintain faith in the universe without defining our Higher Power as some extraterrestrial deity. If you maintain an atheistic or agnostic point of view, simply remember that this slogan is about giving up control. Many of our addictions have been an attempt in small part to gain control.

Progress, Not Perfection: Most meetings open with an excerpt from Chapter 5 (“How It Works”) that contains this very phrase. “We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.” In this specific context, “How It Works” reminds us that we may never fully overcome our spiritual defects—but our willingness to try will elevate us to new heights. We cannot hit a bullseye every time. Sometimes we forget to heed the principles of these slogans, and that is okay—as long as we keep trying. Our holidays will not be perfect when looking back at them, but they will, without a doubt, be better when we adhere to the slogans as much as possible. Wishing you a happy holiday season!

A MEMBER GIVES A PRINTED PAGE TO NEWCOMERS

After a meeting, a member showed me a sheet of folded paper that he kept in his pocket. He said a person gave it to him after a meeting when he was a newcomer. He has carried it with him ever since. I asked him if I could put it in the Centre's monthly newsletter, and he said yes. Please see below the written message that was given to him and that has helped him. Change it to suit your fellowship and your message.

Welcome to AA, my name is _____ and I'm an alcoholic. My phone number is _____.

If you are brand new to AA, let me explain that if you have a desire to stop drinking, and you are here with us, you are already a member of AA. That is the only requirement.

AA group meetings are a place of comfort and hope. You will hear people share their stories and you may relate to them or learn from them. We come in all varieties.

I imagine when you look at me you think "that old gray-haired lady has probably been in AA for 30 years." Wrong. I was probably an alcoholic all my life. Alcoholism is progressive, and it took a long time before my addicted brain could admit it. I came to AA only three years ago. My three adult daughters and husband had an intervention after a particularly bad drunk!

I had never uttered the words "I am an alcoholic" until my first meeting. A man, unknown to me, welcomed me. I can't really remember what he said to me due to my emotions, and my dreadful hangover, as I had been drinking nonstop for a couple of days. What I do remember is that by the time the meeting was over, I felt like I had been part of a miracle. I had hope. I wish this for you!

We know how tough it was to walk through those doors for the first time. Everybody here can remember exactly how it felt. We were completely broken, humiliated, embarrassed, sick, and sad. We had reached the end of the rope or had hit our bottom. We're glad you're here. It's exactly where you should be. No matter what doors you go through from now on, whenever you do, you'll be going to a room with friends who share your problems and welcome you. Remember you're not alone. All of us have done similar things. We buy too many bottles, we hide too many bottles, we hide to drink, we lie, we're always making excuses, we never know when to stop and we lose track of ourselves. Our lives become unmanageable.

What is important now is for you to plan to attend another meeting and get hold of a Big Book, either get one here or get one online and read it. The next important thing is to try to get a sponsor for yourself. A sponsor is somebody you can relate to and a person who will guide you along as much as you need. Tonight, we will offer you the names of contact people and you can call these people day or night whenever you feel troubled or are thinking about drinking.

I know everyone here wishes you a sober 24 hours. Aim to stay sober just for the next 24 hours. Try other meetings, but I hope we see you again.

Matthew Perry Estimates He Spent \$9M to Get Sober and Half His Life in Treatment Facilities (Brent Furdyk, 23 Oct 2022)

Perry nearly died while battling drug and alcohol addiction: 'I had a 2% chance to live', he said.



Matthew Perry is opening up about his harrowing battle with substance abuse in his new memoir and revealed in a recent interview that he has spent millions on his decades-long struggle to get sober.

Discussing his new book *Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing* with the New York Times, the “Friends” star covers some of the memoir’s more shocking revelations of how he suffered from his alcoholism, ranging from the time he bit down on a piece of toast and several of his teeth fell out to his realization that, by age 49, he had spent more than half of his life in sober living facilities and treatment centres.

As Perry told the Times, he had a strange reaction when he completed recording the audiobook for the memoir, thinking to himself, “Oh my God, what a terrible life this person has had!” Then it hit him. “Wait a minute, it’s me! I’m talking about me,” he recalled.

Perry also looks back to how his teenage drinking — cheap wine and Budweiser — eventually escalated into a massive addiction to prescription painkillers that ruled his life.

“I would fake back injuries. I would fake migraine headaches. I had eight doctors going at the same time,” Perry told the Times. “I would wake up and have to get 55 Vicodin that day, and figure out how to do it. When you’re a drug addict, it’s all math. I go to this place, and I need to take three. And then I go to this place, and I’m going to take five because I’m going to be there longer. It’s exhausting but you have to do it or you get very, very sick. I wasn’t doing it to feel high or to feel good. I certainly wasn’t a partier; I just wanted to sit on my couch, take five Vicodin and watch a movie. That was heaven for me. It no longer is.”

According to Perry, he has now been sober for 18 months, meaning he had only recently become clean when the “Friends” reunion aired in May 2021. That journey, he reflected, has taken decades, and did not come without a cost — spiritually, physically and financially. “I’ve probably spent \$9 million or something trying to get sober,” he estimated.

While writing a memoir carries an implication that Perry’s struggles are in the past, that’s not the case. **“It’s still a day-to-day process of getting better. Every day,” he said. “It doesn’t end because I wrote this memoir.”** Ultimately, he added, he’s hopeful that by sharing his experiences he can help others going through similar situations. “Now I feel better because it’s out. It’s out on a piece of paper,” he explained. “The ‘why’ I’m still alive is definitely in the area of helping people.”

Mindfulness Training Provides a Natural High

New research from the University of Utah finds that a mindfulness meditation practice can produce a healthy altered state of consciousness in the treatment of individuals with addictive behaviors. Not unlike what one might experience under the influence of psychedelic drugs—achieving this altered state through mindful meditation has the potential lifesaving benefit of decreasing one’s addictive behaviors.

The study, published in the *Journal of Science Advances*, provides new insight into the neurobiological mechanisms by which mindfulness treats addiction. Study findings provide a promising, safe and accessible treatment option for the more than 9 million Americans misusing opioids. The study builds on previous research measuring the positive effects of theta waves in the human brain. Researchers have found that individuals with low theta waves tend to experience a wandering mind, trouble concentrating or they ruminate on thoughts about themselves.

Theta waves can best be viewed on electroencephalogram, or EEG, scans of the frontal midline regions of their brains. Low theta waves result in a loss of self-control as the brain slips into its default mode of automatic habits. In contrast, when a person is focused, present and fully absorbed in a task, EEG scans will show increased frontal midline theta wave activity.

“With high theta activity, your mind becomes very quiet, you focus less on yourself and become so deeply absorbed in what you are doing that the boundary between yourself and the thing you are focusing on starts to fade away. You lose yourself in what you are doing,” The research team recruited 165 adults with long-term opioid use for the study. Participants were randomly placed into either the control group that participated in supportive group psychotherapy or the experimental group taught to incorporate Mindfulness-Oriented Recovery Enhancement (MORE) into their daily lives.

Before and after the eight weeks of study treatment, all participants were brought into the research lab and had their brain waves measured with EEG while they were asked to try to practice mindfulness meditation. Participants were assessed for opioid misuse for nine months after the treatment ended. MORE also led to significant decreases in opioid misuse through the nine-month follow-up. These reductions in opioid misuse were caused in part by the increases in frontal midline theta brain waves.

In a large clinical trial recently published in *Science Advances*, MORE was shown to reduce opioid misuse by 45%, more than doubling the effect of standard therapy. Study participants in the MORE group learned to practice mindfulness meditation by focusing their attention on their breath or body sensations for sustained periods of time and refocusing their attention when their minds began to wander into obsessive thinking about drugs or life stressors.

Participants showed more than twice as much frontal midline theta brain activity following treatment with MORE, whereas those in supportive therapy showed no increase in theta. It is in this mindful, theta wave state that people begin to experience feelings of self-transcendence and bliss, and the brain changes in ways that actually reduce one’s addictive behaviors. Participants in MORE who showed the biggest increases in theta waves reported more intense experiences of self-transcendence during meditation, including the sense of one’s ego fading away. Therefore, mindfulness can create a pathway for us to transcend our limited sense of self to make way for the experience of being connected to something greater than ourselves.

In 12-step addiction recovery programs, the 11th step—seeking conscious contact with a higher power through prayer or meditation—taps into this same mechanism to promote recovery from addiction. The state of transcendence can be like a blissful, natural high. Rather than seeking a high from something outside of oneself like a drug, meditation can help you find an even greater sense of pleasure, peace, and fulfillment from within.

December 2022 South Edmonton Fellowship Centre

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
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| | | | | 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner (AA) 7:00 PM Keep it Simple (AA) | 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner (AA) 6:30 PM Indo-Canadian Living Sober (AA Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu) 8:00 PM First Response to Recovery (NA) | 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:30 AM Fellowship Breakfast Group (AA) 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner (AA) 2:00 PM Gamblers Anonymous 7:00 PM Sex Addicts Anonymous |
| 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:00 AM Sunday Morning Survivors (NA) Men Only 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner (AA) | 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner (AA) 6:30 PM Our Basic Text (AA) 8:00 PM Awakenings Men's Meeting (AA) | 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner (AA) 7:00 PM ISMs (AA) | 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner (AA) 7:00 PM There is a Solution (CA) | 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner (AA) 7:00 PM Keep it Simple (AA) | 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner (AA) 6:30 PM Indo-Canadian Living Sober (AA Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu) 8:00 PM First Response to Recovery (NA) | 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10:30 AM Fellowship Breakfast Group (AA) 12:00 PM Fellowship Nooner 2:00 PM Gamblers Anonymous 7:00 PM Sex Addicts Anonymous |
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