

# DECONSTRUCTING INSANITY: BRINGING YOURSELF BACK ONLINE

## THE ONE PERSON PROCESS OF RECOVERY: ONE HISTORY, ONE BODY, ONE SELF

### The Basic Five (Daily Needs)

1. Adequate Respiration (Body Ventilation)
2. Adequate Hydration, Nutrition and Elimination
3. Adequate Rest and Restorative Sleep
4. Adequate Temperature Regulation (Internal and External)
5. Adequate Stimulus Level (Avoiding Stimulus Overload and Stimulus Deprivation – pain, fear, panic, despair, and exhaustion)

### Six Essential Recovery Tasks

#### 1) Recognition

This task centers around our recognition of dysfunction including physical responses, cognitive problems and interpersonal difficulties in social situations and with significant others. The fellow traveler's task is to encourage this vital recognition of the signs of distress in a way that builds trust and creates the sense of unity needed to continue in the recovery process.

#### 2) Recollection

This task involves uncovering and embracing the hidden dissociated parts of the self. Because of traumatic conditioning, these hidden parts of our selves perceive, evaluate and respond automatically as independent operating systems. Each system holds a specific set of memories, beliefs and related habits that maintain dissociation. The fellow traveler's task is to provide assurance that recovery is possible and the return of memories and sensation will not be self-destructive.

#### 3) Disobedience

The basic belief in a traumatizing family is that the practice and support of destructive behavior by adults should be tolerated and accepted without protest by the children. Children are threatened, punished, and coerced into keeping the adults' behavior secret. They also incorporate the adults' dissociative and destructive patterns into their own being. Disobedience includes breaking these habits of avoidance and denial and relinquishing our beliefs about maintaining destructive behavior. This may require detoxification from addiction to exogenous substances and the deconditioning of habitual body tension and cognitive hypervigilance. The main subtask is to disobey irrational authority by challenging the belief that we need to continue these behaviors.

#### 4) Retaliation

The motivating force being inhibited is the talionic response (direct eye for an eye retaliation for abuse [Reik]). This instinctive rage toward people who have caused us harm has been forcefully inhibited and is often directed back toward the self (retroflexion - going against the reflexes) or displaced onto others. Unblocking this energy and safely expressing the talionic response opens us up to feel other inhibited emotions and accelerates the process of mourning and grief. The primary subtask is learning to discriminate hostile introjects that have been pounded in and swallowed whole from the people who first caused us to live in fear and to stop displacing rage onto symbolic stand-ins in the present. The fellow traveler can support the differentiation process and the appropriate expression of talionic rage which strengthens reality testing about expected retaliation.

#### 5) Separation

The task of separation is to distinguish between what has been termed "me and not me" (Sullivan). This includes recognizing the internalizations and confusing beliefs of people who hurt us, as well as considering the concept of locus of control and the possibility of independent thought and action.

#### 6) Independence

This final task centers around completion of reflective grieving (mourning the loss of possibilities, opportunities and self-actualization), learning to reparent ourselves, and mastering developmental stages that may have been missed or poorly negotiated. The fellow traveler can assist in the overall process by encouraging the development, rehearsal and implementation of effective social skills and self determined actions that increase self-esteem and self-worth. Most importantly, completion of this task establishes the capacity for genuine intimacy and successful present-directed, goal-oriented living.

### ACA 12 Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over the effects of alcoholism or other family dysfunction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry it out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others who still suffer, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

### Bill W.'s In-Depth "True Self" Inventory

Bill, in a letter to a friend, wrote about deepening AA's moral inventory to focus on what he called psychic damage: "... it may be that someday we shall devise some common denominator of psychiatry – of course, throwing away their much abused terminology – common denominators which neurotics could use on each other. The idea would be to extend the moral inventory of AA to a deeper level, making it an inventory of psychic damages, reliving in conversation episodes, etc. I suppose someday a Neurotics Anonymous will be formed and will actually do all this." He later suggests the inventory be about "actual episodes: inferiority, shame, guilt, anger" so they could be relived in the mind and their power reduced. The true, non-neurotic self could then emerge out of hiding. (Letters with commentary reprinted in Fitzgerald, R (1995), The Soul of Sponsorship, Hazelden, Center City, MN, pp. 41-42.)

Pg. 626, ACA Fellowship Text

### Characteristics of an Adult Child

#### The Laundry List

1. We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
2. We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
3. We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
4. We either become alcoholics, marry them or both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
5. We live life from the viewpoint of victims, and we are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.
6. We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility, and it is easier for us to be concerned with others rather than ourselves; this enables us not to look too closely at our own faults, etc.
7. We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
8. We became addicted to excitement.
9. We confuse love and pity and tend to "love" people we can "pity" and "rescue".
10. We have "stuffed" our feelings from our traumatic childhoods and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much (Denial).
11. We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
12. We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold on to a relationship in order to not experience painful abandonment feelings, which we received from living with sick people who were never there emotionally for us.
13. Alcoholism is a family disease; we became para-alcoholics (codependents) and took on the characteristics of that disease even though we did not pick up the drink.
14. Para-alcoholics (codependents) are reactors rather than actors.

#### The Problem

Many of us found that we had several characteristics in common as a result of being brought up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional household. We had come to feel isolated and uneasy with other people, especially authority figures. To protect ourselves, we became people-pleasers, even though we lost our own identities in the process. All the same we would mistake any personal criticism as a threat. We either became alcoholics (or practiced other addictive behavior) ourselves, or married them, or both. Failing that, we found other compulsive personalities, such as a workaholic, to fulfill our sick need for abandonment.

We lived life from the standpoint of victims. Having an over developed sense of responsibility, we preferred to be concerned with others rather than ourselves. We got guilt feelings when we stood up for ourselves rather than giving in to others. Thus, we became reactors, rather than actors, letting others take the initiative.

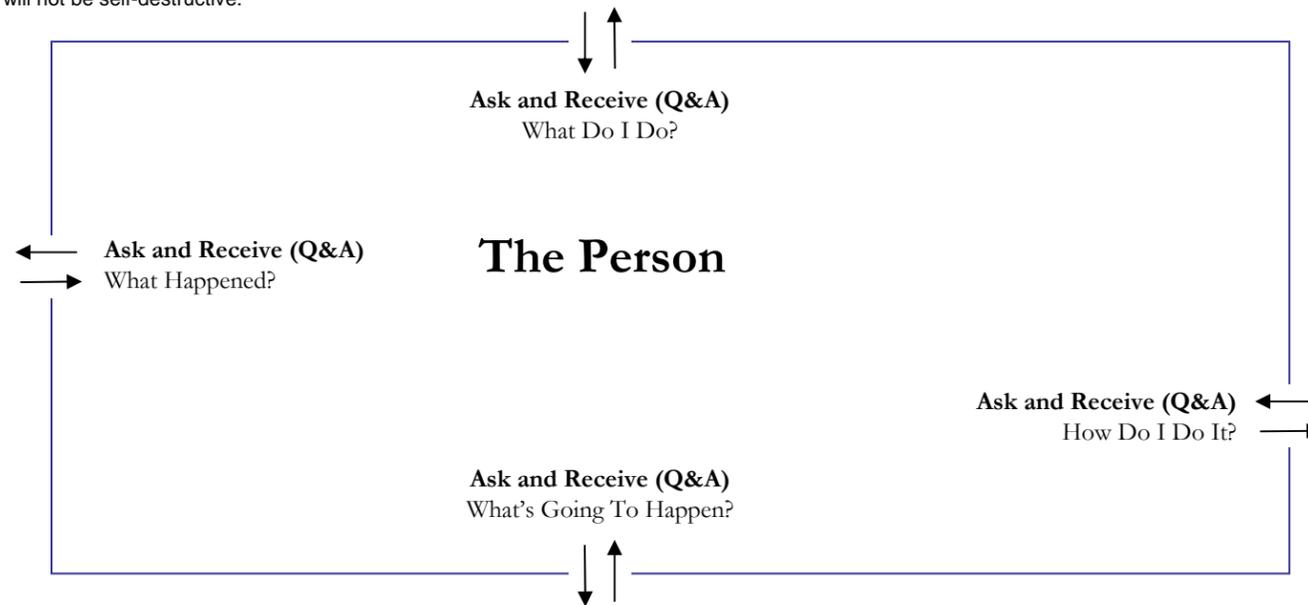
We were dependent personalities, terrified of abandonment, willing to do almost anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to be abandoned emotionally. Yet we kept choosing insecure relationships because they matched our childhood relationship with alcoholic or dysfunctional parents. These symptoms of the family disease of alcoholism or other dysfunction made us "co-victims," those who take on the characteristics of the disease without necessarily ever taking a drink. We learned to keep our feelings down as children and kept them buried as adults. As a result of this conditioning, we confused love with pity, tending to love those we could rescue.

Even more self-defeating, we became addicted to excitement in all our affairs, preferring constant upset to workable relationships.

This is a description, not an indictment.

#### Note:

*The Laundry List* and *The Problem* emphasize slightly different aspects of dysfunction and they are best read together for a more complete picture of post-childhood reactions to dysfunction in the home.



### The 12 Promises

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through.

1. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.
2. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.
3. We will comprehend the word serenity.
4. And we will know peace.
5. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.
6. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.
7. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows.
8. Self-seeking will slip away.
9. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.
10. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.
11. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.
12. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us - sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.

### Amends Process:

*The amends process begins with the self, with restoration and restitution for the self-punishment, neglect, and abuse that was done intentionally or inadvertently.*

### The Flip Side of The Laundry List

1. We move out of isolation and are not unrealistically afraid of other people, even authority figures.
2. We do not depend on others to tell us who we are.
3. We are not automatically frightened by angry people and no longer regard personal criticism as a threat.
4. We do not have a compulsive need to recreate abandonment.
5. We stop living life from the standpoint of victims and are not attracted by this trait in our important relationships.
6. We do not use enabling as a way to avoid looking at our own shortcomings.
7. We do not feel guilty when we stand up for ourselves.
8. We avoid emotional intoxication and choose workable relationships instead of constant upset.
9. We are able to distinguish love from pity, and do not think "rescuing" people we "pity" is an act of love.
10. We come out of denial about our traumatic childhoods and regain the ability to feel and express our emotions.
11. We stop judging and condemning ourselves and discover a sense of self-worth.
12. We grow in independence and are no longer terrified of abandonment. We have interdependent relationships with healthy people, not dependent relationships with people who are emotionally unavailable.
13. The characteristics of alcoholism and para-alcoholism we have internalized are identified, acknowledged, and removed.
14. We are actors, not reactors.

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**Thoughts On Inside Service (In-Reach)**

Service in general is taking action to support and encourage adult children as they make the transition from fragmentation and regression to integrity and present-day thinking and doing. This means being ever-mindful of the requirement to 12<sup>th</sup> Step ourselves to wholeness and emotional sobriety. As more and more of the self wakes up we are increasingly able to go within and find, comfort and heal the hurt, vulnerable and frightened "inner" children, who have been lost, hidden or frozen in time and place, and bring them up and forward to the here and now. This completes the reunion of the divided self.

*Cling to the thought that, in God's hands, the dark past is the greatest possession you have - the key to life and happiness for others. With it you can avert death and misery for them.*

Pg. 124, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA Big Book)