

Principles to Live By



My adolescence was spent cultivating a drinking habit, and I had no time to develop principles of proper action. I had read what others thought, but I used that information only to rebel against convention. Today, I need a set of principles that will not fail and will make possible a new life without drinking. I've found these principles in the Big Book and in the Twelve Steps.

The first principle of honesty is given even before the Steps in chapter three: "We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholic." I had come to believe this while I was in the county jail shaking off my last drunk. I was an alcoholic, not just a heavy drinker, not a victim of bad luck and circumstances, not a product of an unsympathetic society. I was an alcoholic and would

probably die drunk. I recognized my status and understood I could do nothing about it.

I found my way to AA shortly after release from jail and was given the principle of hope. Without hope the truth of my situation would have been devastating, but I met others who had drunk as I had. They were now sober, some of them for years. They were sober because a power greater than themselves had restored them from the insanity of drinking. If I did as my new friends had done, I could have what they had.

However, my newfound hope would degenerate into wishful thinking unless I developed additional principles. The first of these came from the Third Step. Faith that God was concerned for my well-being was foreign to me. I hadn't been able to grapple with God out

there in the universe, much less God in my life. Now for hope to be realized, I needed faith that God would enter my life and take away the need to drink. Faith that comes from turning my will and life over to the care of God is the principle that gives me strength to continue in our Fellowship.

The decision to turn my will and life over to God's care meant nothing without the Fourth Step. Alone, it had no more effect than my thousands of promises to quit drinking. I had to discover what my will and life were so I could turn them over. I had to find the courage to write my inventory and discover who I really was. That courage came while I was sitting in the parking lot of a liquor store thinking about my next drink. I saw that I would either ask God for the strength to do my inventory or buy a bottle.

If I think that I'm the source of my courage I become a braggart. My gift of courage must be tempered by humility. Fortunately this principle is the root of our Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Steps. I must humbly admit my defects to myself, God, and another person. Becoming ready to have God remove my defects and asking him to remove them is even more humbling.

Steps Six and Seven, along with Eleven, teach the value of patience and the principle of patience tunes me in to the harmony of God's world. The Seventh Step prayer asks God to act in his time for his purposes. I can only continue to pray and work as if he has

removed my defects while I wait for him to act as he sees best.

Alcoholism required me to function without regard for others in my life. Recovery requires me to consider all those about me and accept responsibility for my actions now and in the past. Steps Eight, Nine, and Ten give me a way to do this. This principle of responsibility makes me a contributing member of society.

Love is the principle that guided my first friends in AA. They welcomed me, without question, into their Fellowship. They were not concerned about anything except that I was a drunk. I was asked if I wanted help, if I had a place to sleep that night, and if I'd care for a cup of coffee. I was allowed to be myself, as best I could. No demands were made, no expectations were declared, no conformity was required. I was simply invited to share what they offered. Love, as the component of the Twelfth Step, is the most godly of the principles on our path of recovery. It is the one principle that makes AA what it is, a Fellowship of the Spirit.

The authors of the Big Book talked of principles, and in their wisdom, left it to each of us to discover what those principles are. The overriding principle is, of course, sobriety, which I have found to encompass eight other principles of honesty, hope, faith, courage, humility, patience, responsibility and love.

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