

EMOTIONAL SOBRIETY

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Some of you know that I believe in my deepest heart that sobriety is a learning process which produces a new person living a new way of life – what Bob called this afternoon “a transformation.” It really is a transformation. And it is profound, as he said this afternoon. But I’m not talking about learning in the sense that some of us “learned” when we went to school. You know, we go to school, you sit in rows, you get this information, you spit it back on Friday, and you forget it. That’s not learning. That’s incidental to learning. Gaining a bunch of knowledge is incidental. It means nothing.

Real learning is what this program gives to us, if we’re very careful about it. Real learning is a permanent change in behavior that’s brought about by sustained practice of the knowledge that you gained. You do it, and you do it, and you do it, and you do it ... and you’re transformed.

And you don’t know why ... but you know it has something to do with this program. The more we learn, the more we grow ... and we change. Now, I’m convinced that the sobriety I’m talking about tonight is not just for alcoholics. It’s for all who want to grow spiritually. So what I say tonight should apply to everyone here, alcoholic or not.

As we progress in recovery we move through certain stages or levels of sobriety. This surprises some people – it doesn’t surprise me any more. In the first stage, sobriety is just abstinence – you just put the plug in the jug. And then if you pursue the program of recovery, there comes a station in this progress called “rebirth.” It’s more than a 2-syllable, 7-letter word. It is the beginning of this transformational process which changes us deeply.

And then comes infancy. You see, second birth is just like first birth. We’re gonna go through the same stages we went through the first time. Anyone here remember going through the terrible two’s? I remember my little girl when she went through the terrible two’s ... she got some spaghetti – she had beautiful blonde hair – and had it all in her hair, and was bangin’ on the high chair for more. And that was me in the terrible two’s ... hell I darn knew everything. Why ask anybody else everything? Walkin’ on water was old hat to me, man. It’s just, I was so brilliant, and so spiritual that I went home and told my wife: you know if you don’t straighten up you’re gonna have to get the hell out – cause I’m so spiritual.

Now that’s the way an infant would act, isn’t it? And I needed somebody to change my diapers, and the group did. I had a cradle to live in called an AA group just like every infant needs. I’m talkin’ literally ... the terrible two’s. And we go through other stages ... we go through a stage I’ll talk about later called five-year menopause. And in each level, the meaning of sobriety expands and changes, until we reach the very highest level of sobriety. It’s call purity of heart.

I never will forget a friend of mine who used to get together with me on Sunday morning and we'd read together ... Jim E. from up in Charlotte. Some of you know him ... the Charlotte contingent is over here – don't pay any attention to them. And we got into this book called (words garbled) – and it's a book about some ancient monks ... desert father they called them practiced the interior prayer of the heart: "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me" over and over and over. This was their mantra. And in reading through this one day, all these guys talked about was sobriety. These were not drunks. And they're always talkin' about sobriety and we turned in this book one day to get something to talk about and meditate upon, and the line said: "In the final analysis, sobriety is purity of heart."

Now think about that for a minute. That's a long jump from abstinence, isn't it? It's a long jump from infancy and the terrible two's. It's a long jump for everybody. And purity of heart, I think, means clarity of thought, which leads to consistently good behavior and clear perception of yourself and others. The blinders come off. A total acceptance of self and others. Unconditional love for self and others. Self respect. Absolute surrender to God. Total integrity. Maximum service to God and others. And as the scriptures say –and it's not conference approved but I'm gonna say it anyway – blessed are the pure of heart for what? They shall see God. That's a pretty high mark, isn't it? And yet, that's what these desert fathers said sobriety was in the final analysis. And on the way toward this highest level, which in all probability none of us will ever reach, there's a level through which everyone who's in the process of sobriety will inevitably pass. And this stage is what Bill Wilson called "emotional sobriety." And that's what I'm gonna talk to you about tonight.

You know, this is a "we" world. It's a world of relationships ... of interdependency ... we of all people should know the power of the word "we" – the power of connection with other and with God. We should really appreciate that. I, left to my devices, couldn't be sober ten seconds. You, left to your own devices, couldn't be sober ten seconds. Every one of us is entirely without power and yet when "we" connect we have power and more to go around. Now, you explain that, I can't. But I know there's great power in community.

It's been said that each of us the only one that give the other what each of us needs to have. All of us like to receive support, approval, love from other people. We need these things to reinforce what we believe about ourselves. And when we accept input from others properly it gives support to know we know, feel and believe about ourselves – and we're healthy. But when we become too dependent on what others say about us or do to us, our beliefs and feelings about ourselves can become based on their input only. And when this happens, we get sick.

Now, the last six years in my personal life – and I'll talk about this Sunday morning, but not too much right now – have been the worst I've ever had in sobriety, in terms of what has happened to me. I, like many of you, was surprised when the world didn't change when I got sober. And the last six years have been a lot of sickness, lot of death, cancer, emphysema, high blood pressure, deep vein phlebitis – I'm a walkin' time bomb. But the thing that stands out in my mind was the woman that I loved most of all on the face of God's earth leaving me in 1991.

Now, I hit bottom. Again. I went beyond grief. I went into real mourning. I went into suicidal thinking. I sincerely asked God every night to not to let me wake up the next morning. I begged to die. I'd go to bed at night and mark another day off the calendar and think "thank God that's gone" ... you know, one less day I have to live. I turned around to this and during this time I was scraping absolute bottom emotionally, and spiritually I think.

I came upon this article by Bill Wilson. It was a letter that he had written to another old timer, mind you, an old timer, and it appeared in the Grapevine 1958 and it was entitled "The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety." And Bill talked about the issue of over dependence on other people. Using himself as an example he tells why, in this article, that even though he was practicing the principles of AA in his life, he was not experiencing the joy and peace he thought he should feel from doing this.

Although he was living the life, he still felt insecure, insignificant, and virtually worthless. He knew he was doing what was right and good, yet he did not feel good about himself – and depression, his old enemy, he said, was just around the corner, and he knew it.

And by looking at his life, he discovered that he was and had been almost totally dependent on other groups or people to make him feel good about himself. He needed other people in order to give him approval ... to give his prestige ... to give him security. And what's more, he was demanding these things from these people.

In the article – I'll just read part of it to you:

"Suddenly I realized what the matter was. My basic flaw had always been dependence – almost absolute dependence – on people or circumstances to supply me with prestige, security and the like. Failing to get these things according to my perfectionist dreams and specifications, I had fought for them. And when defeat came, so did my depression. Because I had, over the years undergone a little spiritual development, the absolute quality of these frightful dependencies had never before been so starkly revealed.

Reinforced by what grace I could secure in prayer, I found I had to exert every ounce of will and action to cut off these faulty emotional dependencies on people, upon AA, indeed, upon any set of circumstances whatsoever. Plainly, I could not avail myself of God's love until I was able to offer it back to him by loving others as he would have me. And I couldn't possibly do that, so long as I was victimized by false dependencies. For my dependency meant demand – demand for the possession and control of the people and the conditions surrounding me."

In short, Bill discovered after 23-plus years of sobriety that he was emotionally unsober. He had become depend on other to provide him with the feelings which should've come to him from himself as a result of his own actions. And it was his article, plus my own experience of being very emotionally unsober, which set me to thinking and more than that, *doing* some things, and I'm gonna share these with you tonight.

Now I'm not a psychiatrist – thank God for that. I've victimized quite a few of them – and I'm not an expert. The last expert I heard was an expert on marriage. Man, she's got tapes ... she's making millions of dollars selling 'em all over this country ... b_ _ _ _ been married eight times. Now she knows a lot about how to get in a relationship, but how about stayin' in 'em?

I've almost come to believe that alcoholism and relationships are almost mutually exclusive terms. There are two terms I'm gonna use with you tonight: emotional sobriety, and emotional inebriety, or if you prefer, unsoberness. Let me try to explain 'em in "little red hen" language, which is all I can understand.

Emotional sobriety is loosely defined as: *when what I know to be true about myself and what I believe and feel about myself are pretty much consistent.* In other words, I'm emotionally sober when my beliefs and feelings about me match the facts about me. When I'm emotionally sober and the facts show I'm a good person, I believe I'm a good person, and I feel good about myself. And when I'm emotionally sober the input of other affects me, but it does not determine what I believe and how I feel about myself.

Self-respect, self worth and any other positive feelings about myself come from within me. I have what Bob mentioned this afternoon: integrity. Integrity. That's become a very important word to me. Emotional unsoberness on the other hand exists when what I believe and feel about myself is inconsistent sometimes totally so, with what is obviously true about me. That is, my beliefs and feelings about me don't match the facts about me. And when I'm emotionally unsober, even though the facts clearly show I'm a good person, I can't seem to believe I am. Nor do I feel good about myself. And when I'm emotionally unsober the input of others almost totally determines what I believe and how I feel about me. I, like Bill Wilson, looked to others to give me a good feeling and give me self-esteem feeling of self worth and belonging. In short, and this is how crazy it is: I depend on others to tell me how to feel about me. Think about that.

Now, any emotionally sober or unsober people out here? You know you don't have to be an alcoholic in recovery to be emotionally sober or unsober. Let me ask you a few questions. I'm not gonna ask you to raise your hands or anything. I would pass it out and grade it but you'd all flunk.

Question: yes or no: Do you accept criticism well? Are you usually hurt or angered by criticism? Do you have a difficult time accepting compliments? Do others think more highly of you than you do of yourself? Do you depend on others to make you feel good about yourself? Anybody flunkin' yet?

Does what other say about you unduly influence your feelings and beliefs about yourself? Do you often do a good job and know it, but don't feel good about it?

Do you often feel like a loser – even though you know you're a good person? Do you often put yourself down? Looking honestly at your life, do you treat yourself very well? Do you treat other better than you treat yourself? Do you do nice things for others in order to get attention or compliments? When you express love for someone are you hurt when he or she

doesn't respond in kind? Do you often feel afraid, even though you know everything's okay? Do you often feel you're not enough? Do you often feel you're falling short of what you *should* be and what you *should* do? Does it bother you a great deal when you know that someone dislikes or disapproves of you? Do you kiss ass to make 'em like you? (That wasn't one of the questions, by the way.) Do you often refrain from doing or saying what you know you should for fear of how other may react to it? Do your feelings depend on how your significant other is treating you? (Bob what are you coverin' up for?) Do you feel you're a good person no matter what others may think?

How'd you do?

If you answered several of these questions (and I have a feeling some of you did) in the affirmative, you're probably emotionally unsober to some degree. Although emotional unsoberness is not confined to those in recovery, it's especially important to them, because it is the stage in recovery through which those in recovery will invariably pass. You can put that in the bank – and maybe not just once, either. And it can be very dangerous to 'em, and at the least it can preclude a happy serene and meaningful sobriety and at worst it can and often does lead to relapse.

Two things make it very dangerous: First, the person is usually not aware of what it is nor of its presence in his life. And second, when he becomes aware of it and knows what it is, he can't seem to change it -- he doesn't know how!

Let's look at these two dangers, one at a time. The first danger: He's not aware of it. Why is a person not aware of the presence of emotional inebriety or unsoberness? First reason is the simplest. Most people in recovery don't even know there is such a thing. I didn't. Second, because it usually represents a lifelong pattern of behavior which has become of part of the person's deepest self – his character.

And because of this, it operates automatically and unconsciously, just like a tape recording. A certain button's pushed and I do this. Another button's pushed and I do that. Other people can tell you precisely what I'm gonna do at any given situation ... it's obvious to them and I'm not aware of it, it's an unconscious, habitual almost instinctual response based on my internal values and beliefs and perceptions and feelings and experiences. That's what dictates my behavior: my character. And isn't it something that operates beneath my own consciousness? The tape starts playin', you know. I'm not aware of it. It's just automatic.

Third: When it shows up, it doesn't give a clear picture of itself. It usually shows up as group of symptoms which could indicate a number of problems. Some of these symptoms of emotional inebriety other than the questions you answered could things like a lingering feeling. I don't mean a passing feeling – a lingering feeling that all is not well. A continuing sense of uneasiness. Feeling down. A dull continuous sense of anxiety. A feeling of worthlessness. And because these feelings could indicate several conditions, the emotional unsoberness is often misdiagnosed, usually as depression.

It's amazing how many people get in this stage in recovery and are diagnosed as being clinically depressed. Don't get me wrong there are people who are clinically depressed, but then there's emotional inebriety and when you're going through that stage, Prozac and Zoloft ain't gonna help you.

What makes the condition so much more problematic is that it usually doesn't show up until the person is well into recovery. And when it does show up, it does so as the vague group of symptoms I mentioned and usually the person is doing his best to practice the program of recovery. So he simply can't understand why, since he's doing his best, he feels so bad.

Good example of this: When I was a couple of years sober, two of my really good friends in my home group picked up five year tokens and got drunk almost immediately. It blew my mind. It scared me. I never knew anybody got drunk again, you know. And two of 'em, bang bang, within three weeks of each other. I said to my sponsor, "What is happen' here?" He said, "Go to the hospital and ask Louis" – that was the last guy's name. And I went out there, and you know what he described to me? What I just described to you. Everything in my life was roses man – but I felt worthless and uneasy and scared all the time, you know – and I reached for the only that I knew would relieve all these symptoms at that point in time.

And I went back to my sponsor and I told him what Louis had said and he said, "We got a name for that, son," he said, "It's five year menopause." I can not tell you how many people have come to me over the years, Bob, expressing these very feelings ... things couldn't be any better in their lives. But they're not happy ... they don't feel useful ... they're empty inside you know. You know what I tell 'em ... and they don't like it ... "It's time to join Alcoholics Anonymous." And I don't mean with alcohol, it's not related to alcohol anymore ... alcohol has nothing to do with it.

What I mean is: Begin to do this thing as a way of living – there are surrenders beyond surrenders! You were in trouble. These steps worked on the worst problem you've ever had in your life. Who is to say they won't work on this one, too, my friend?

Can you surrender to your present condition and begin back at Step 1? Join AA. It's a way of living. It's a design for living. It's what the Big Book says. We're prayin' so much around what alcohol says ... alcoholism is a disease ... I think we've belittled it. It's a way of life! And so is recovery. It's a way of life! It's not a cure.

What makes it even more of a problem, if it's not problem enough, it usually is not clearly (note that word) identified – if indeed it's identified at all – until that person is quite advanced in recovery. Bill Wilson – 23-plus years, and his letter, I'll point out ... it's on page 236 of The Language Of The Heart" if you want to read it sometime it's okay – was written to an old-timer and referred to other oldsters in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Me, I was 26-plus years sober before I became fully aware of what was going on, now mind you, Bill W., he had an inkling of what was going on, remember in his story when he had to be

on top in everything he did. Because he couldn't sing he had to lead the chorus. Because he couldn't play, he had to lead the band. He had to do everything! You're looking at it here! Whatever was lacking, I gained control of, and I gained it quickly. And when he was without all of these accomplishments, what'd he feel like? Depressed ... depressed. I was aware that things were not well with me for a long time, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

In Bill's case and in my case, and I'm not trying to compare the two of us except in this sense: It took a crisis! With him, it was "Oh my God not another depression. After all these years of depression ... oh please, not another depression." It was a crisis. He had to look. And with me it was Lisa walkin' out of my life.

Now hopefully if you listen tonight you won't have to have a crisis to begin to deal with it, you know. God I wish I'd known about this a long time ago. I'm not sayin' I'd have done anything about it, but I wish I'd know about it. I'd have said, "Oh that's an interesting idea, I'll wait till I'm 26 years sober and fall apart!"

And I think it needs to be shared – and it frighten some people – I say, "My God, is that what I have to look forward to?" "Do I have to lose eight million dollars and two million dollars?" No, you can lose a couple hundred, like me. Bankruptcy's bankruptcy, you know? Do I have to go through all of this ... like a friend of mine said ... one day he told me, "Tom if they'd told me how many things I was powerless over when I got here, and how many time I'd have to surrender, I'd never have joined this damn outfit!"

Powerlessness is a state of being. It can be an accursed state of being, or the most blessed state of being on the face of the earth ... when you just sit there and say, "I can't do it.

The nature of emotional inebriety... that even though the person's doing well and knows it, something deep inside him refuses to let him experience the appropriate feelings he should have about himself. Nor is able to believe he's a worthwhile person and that all is well. His feelings and beliefs are not consistent with what he knows to be true about himself and his life. I had this brought forcefully to my attention by a friend. He used to get together ... my wife, his wife and our kids and sit around and have breakfast on Saturday morning.

And these people were always telling me what a wonderful person I was and it made the hair stand up on my back. I don't know why, but it did. And every time they'd say something like that, I'd throw it right back to 'em. And it infuriated me, and one morning this friend says, "I am damn sick and tired of giving you compliments and having you slap me in the face with 'em. Of telling you I love you and having you reject me by throwing it back at me. And I'm in my grand glory by then. "Well," I said, "If I'm so damn wonderful why don't y'all take a positive inventory of me ... ha, ha and I stalked out the door.

My wife did, he did, his wife did, and their oldest daughter did ... they set me down with it ... I said I'll around to it, they had a stack that high of paper. They said you're gonna read it now. I never will forget, I went into the den and read what they'd written, every bit of it was true and I could not accept it!

You get frightened, you know, and insecure. And that's an understatement. I didn't like me, and I didn't like my life. Everybody else did. Most people thought I was doing pretty good and I'd say "well yeah" ... but I didn't buy it.

What does person usually do? All too often he drinks again. And if he doesn't relapse he seeks from other persons groups or activities, like gambling Bob, the approval and comfort and comfort he can't seem to find. Most often, he'll get into sick sex. Or emotional religiosity I call it. It's not real religion, it's religiosity. Or he might start smoking again, Bob. Please I'm not puttin' you down or laughin' at you.

I got into sick sex. I went crazy. I went absolutely crazy. Beautiful redhead walked into my office down the college, I said "Can I help you, what do you want?" She said, "You." And for the next seven years, I was nuts. She bounced me around like a rubber ball. Why is it that we attract borderline personalities?

Why is it? I wondered. You know one moment they're lovin' you to death ... the next moment they're tryin' to kill you. That woman kicked me in the testicles every chance she had. And I hung in there, man! You know what I said to myself? Some day, some how, if I just handle it right I'll be able to control this redhead. Then there was a brunette more control just bounced me all over the world. I went nuts!

Tryin' to screw my way to heaven. An orgasm is heavenly, I'll tell you that. But it ain't the path to glory, I'll tell you that. I didn't know what was wrong.

Some people whose lives are meaningless go into this emotional religiosity, man.

A lady in my neighborhood, she's the best example I ever had of that. The woman was not well and she got into this fundamentalist church and she got sicker and she said, "Know what happened to me last Sunday in church?" I said, No." She said, "I said, "Halleluiah and foo just like that!" I said, "Well who the hell did that help? And she just went to cussin' me like you wouldn't believe, man. I don't recall Jesus sayin' a damn thing about freezing.

Whatever it is we get into, we fall into this syndrome. This whole group of symptoms ... the emotional unsober syndrome ... what Bill called "the emotional demand cycle." It's based on false beliefs. Listen: and it's grounded, always, in fear. It consists of some or all of the following.

Question time again:

A continuing sense of uneasiness. Putting yourself down. Seeking approval, acceptance and emotional security from someone and/or something else. I got on the circuit of Alcoholics Anonymous when I was three years sober, okay? And I'm gonna tell you something now I couldn't have told you for a long time because I didn't know it. Until the people stood and applauded, I didn't amount to nothin'. And five minutes after they set down, I didn't amount to nothin'. You hear me? I needed that so bad, and I didn't know it, and today I realized it and you know what I say today" "Ya'll applaud, it'll be fine, and if you don't I ain't going to die."

God what a feeling of relief that was ... you know ... and I didn't realize that ... seek constant reassurance ... never getting enough approval ... it's like being insatiable.

"Do you love me?" "Yeah, honey" "Really?" "Yeah!" "How much? How long? Will you always?" Feelin' like a victim. Bob talked about this ... blaming others when your needs aren't met. These insatiable needs, I'm talkin' about.

Tryin' to control and possess another, or others, to ensure the feelin' you need ... doin' these again, please unconsciously and automatically. If I did these things deliberately I would be evil. But if I do 'em unconsciously and automatically, I'm not evil -- I'm sick. Please note the difference. Intention does play a big part. This pattern of behavior always leads to failure. Why? Well if your needs are insatiable, you never get enough. So you try harder. You push people. You push 'em and you push 'em and you drive 'em away. Then you end up without those you think you need to meet your needs. Hell of a situation, isn't it? And your fear deepens and you try again. But your own behavior ensures that you're gonna continue to fail.

The Big Book – I read it one time – covers this syndrome in masterful detail on pages 60 to 62. Each person is like an actor, who wants to run the whole show ... is forever tryin' to arrange the ballet, the scenery, and the rest of the players in his own way.

I'm not overstating that. I came that close. Discovered it can be dealt with in such a way that that your growth will be enhanced. Are some of you or any of you caught up in this syndrome? I'm not asking for a show of hands. If you're not sure, observe yourself for a few days. Watch for the syndrome or one of its manifestations. And one of the commonest manifestations is usually called "people pleasing." Like all forms of the syndrome, it's based on false beliefs and it's grounded in fear and like all other forms it always fails. People pleasing ... a belief. Pleasing others will beget love and approval, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Not pleasing others will beget abandonment ... rejection ... the deepest fear of all human beings – the fear of being left alone. Then people pleaser tries to please to get love and approval. If these are not forthcoming he tries more. If he does this in one-to-one relationships, what happens? In my experience, he places his emotions and life, without knowing it, in the hands on the significant other. He looks to the other to fill all his needs. He puts the other in the center of his life. Makes him or her, as it were, his god. Idolatry plays a big part in our disease. Was that in your fourth Step?

He unconsciously tries to control and posses the other to ensure the fulfillment of needs and tries to control the other and what's the outcome? The other always leaves. His problem his basic belief is false He drives the other away because of his fear. Truth of the matter --- even if he pleased the other to the max it will not beget love or approval.

And, if you're looking to another to fill all your needs you will, because of fear, put such pressure on the other that you'll drive him or her away, and thus you will bring to pass the very thing you feared: abandonment. People pleasing and all other forms of emotional unsoberness, you see, are self-fulfilling prophecies, and they're goaded on by fear. This

statement of the person in the Bible, I forget who it was: "Lo that which I much feared has come upon me." Think about that. In the book Alcoholics Anonymous we think fear ought to be classed with stealing. The fabric of our existence was shot through with it, it was an evil and corroding thread. Listen: It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve. Fear sets in motion trains of circumstances that bring about the very thing that we fear. Please think about that.

Second thing which is so dangerous about emotional unsoberness is that even when you become aware of it, you can't seem to change it. Try as he might, he can't seem to be rid of it. It seems to have a life of its own ... goes into motion automatically, and the truth is, it *does* have a life of its own. Or it's become an integral part of his character. And the only way he can be rid of it, is through that profound change Bob was talking about today: a change in character.

Now character is what I really am. It's that set of internal traits like values and beliefs, memories and experience .. these things I mentioned before ... that cause me to behave in certain ways. Personality is what you see out here. I could put on a mask and you'd like I'm anything. But my character, you can see in my behavior. I could tell you so and so is valuable to me and if my behavior does not support that, I'm a liar. Look at behavior ... trace it. Why do you thing the inventory does that? Trace your behavior ... back to the source ... your fault! ... the source of it. Character defects, you know, are traits that we have which operate unconsciously, habitually, automatically to your detriment and/or mine. They are hurtful traits of character -- and they have a life of their own. And unless we expose them to the light they grow and flourish

Such a change as a change in character can be accomplished only by the most strenuous effort plus grace ... plus grace.

It's almost like, in a real way, grace many times is God's reaction to my action ... my willing action. Yeah, the boy's going to try ... and I'm going to help him. But if the boy sits there inactive, I don't believe God's going to help him.

Saddest thing about this whole thing is that most who are emotionally unsober will remain that way the rest of their lives. Why? Some won't ever be aware of it. Others, though aware, won't know what to do to change it. And others who know what they must do to change it will not be willing to put forth the effort to do so. Only those that become aware that they're emotionally unsober understand the nature of the problem, have a way to deal with it, and put forth maximum effort to be able to grow away from it. Now let me tell you something ... even though they grow, they may never be totally rid of it, because it runs so deep. God it runs deep.

It's important we not overlook something which I think is vital to this matter. You know we've looked at emotional unsoberness, its nature, some of its chief manifestations. It's good as far as it goes. But where does it all begin? What are the basic causes of it? Where's it come from? What is this something deep inside me which refuses to let me, even though I'm a good

person, feel good about me and believe I'm a good person? What is it?! Ain't got time tonight to get into a third coverage ... so I'll point some ways and maybe you can find it.

I want to call your attention to what I'm convinced is the most significant cause of the entire problem... the chief barrier to emotional sobriety and what I believe to be the most malignant character defect of all. Let me call your attention to self-hate. Self-hate is reversed of self-love. It's Narcissus frowning at himself in the water. It's just as ego centered and just as arrogant, but it's the opposite extreme from Narcissism.

It consists of a set of unconscious beliefs about the self. For instance, think about this: I always believed I wasn't worth lovin', and so the people who tried to love me, I hurt. I hurt 'em bad. They had the audacity to try to love me? I didn't know I was doing this. Why am I doing this? This is bad behavior. And the hate deepened. I thought I was worthless. I felt like a complete failure -- in the face of great success, I felt like a complete failure.

I remember telling a psychiatrist once, he said describe yourself to me. I said I'm 22 years old and without hesitation, you know what I said? "I'm the sorriest son-of-a-bitch on the face of God's earth." And y'all, I didn't hear what I said. That's what I totally believed, and I didn't hear it. All these beliefs are negative and false. Where does self-hate come from? Alcoholism? Nah. Although all are reinforced and magnified by alcoholism ... these beliefs about yourself don't come from alcoholism. I remember feeling like a failure when I was five years old. I didn't fit in when I was five years old. The fact is, these beliefs usually precede alcoholism and may last well into recovery as we've seen. In my opinion, these beliefs result from, number one: perfectionism, possibly as a result of significant childhood influences. I'm not tellin' you to blame your momma or blame your daddy – but if they influenced you to be a perfectionist, if they demanded perfection of you ... *forgive 'em and accept what you are and go to work on it!*

The bonding of the guilt and the shame and remorse of your lifetime. Bob talked about shame this afternoon ... arising from what he or she perceives, remember, through perfectionist eyes ... to be his or her failures. You know perfection produces only one thing: failure. That's it.

A perfectionist is by definition a failure in his or her own eyes. Self-hate produces symptoms. Listen: Self-haters have an excessive need for acceptance and approval. Excessive! They sabotage themselves, and it sounds silly, but it's serious. Oh they treat themselves bad, self-haters do. They put themselves down, often. Now if you want to find how you really feel about yourself take one day ... one day ... hell, take two hours, and watch how many times you put yourself down during that day.

A man wrote a whole book on these things one time called "Vultures" the father of values clarification, Sid Simon, wrote this book, and "vultures," you know, are those self put downs and he said the thing about "vultures," if you don't spot 'em and get rid of 'em right away the whole flock comes and lands on your shoulder. Self put downs, watch for them ... negating compliments – "You did a good job" ... "Ah, here's five reasons why I didn't" you know you don't want to do that do you ... just automatically spit it back?

I'll tell you one thing, lookin' back on my life, if anyone had treated me as bad as I treated me, I'd kill 'em. I'd kill 'em. It's the truth. Self-haters are totally unable to tolerate criticism. It's almost like your saying to the person "Don't you dare criticize me, that's my job." Isn't that weird? They always hurt those who love 'em the most. Always ... god that's hard.

I think about my kids after I got sober. I was a lousy father. Don't tell my son I said that. My son weighs 215 pounds now and he's six-foot three. And I put myself down one time in a meeting, and he took me outside and he says to me, "Don't you ever put yourself down in front of me again. If I had wanted a better father, I couldn't have found him." I didn't believe that lie, but you know, it was nice of the boy to say so.

They condemn themselves. I did this last week. You ever get in the dark and head for glass of water and hit your little toe on the coffee table? You know what I say to me when I make a mistake like that? It's automatic, even today, and I know what's going on ... "you stupid bastard." My toe's hurting and I'm standing there calling myself a stupid bastard. How many of ya'll do this? And I've got to stop for a minute and think about my toe and take care of it, you know.

They always have a negative concept of a higher power. How many alcoholics have you heard say "I'm scared to death of God?" You know why? Because their self concept is so lousy. If I'm the sorriest son-of-a-bitch on the face of God's earth, then God must be a judge. He must have a little black book. He is after me! See how your concept of yourself reflects on your concept of God? Self-haters are always rigid. Notice that? ... rigid! They're really spiritually dead.

Lao Tzu, you mentioned him today ... said "that which is alive is flexible and yielding. That which is dead is rigid and stiff." Self-haters are rigid and stiff. They have the deepest possible fear of abandonment and rejection. The person who hates himself cannot possibly feel good about himself or believe he's a good person. And unless there's a radical change, he'll become what he erroneously believes himself to be.

You know how powerful beliefs are? If I believe deeply I'm a loser, get what I'm gonna be? If I believe I'm gonna fail, guess what I'm gonna do? If I believe I'm a rotten person, how often do we have to live this out? It's like you have this belief about yourself and you go out and fulfill it. A belief is like giving a command to your unconscious – it just does it. You say, "Why is it happening to me?" Examine your beliefs. Examine your values.

There's a solution. But it's gonna take at least the following (I don't know all the answers) ... First: Foremost: Surrender. Surrender to what? To the truth of my condition and my powerlessness over it. The truth of my condition and my powerlessness to change it.

Got to make a real commitment to change. And you've got to have a means to bring about the change. And you've got to have that major effort I talked about to effect that change because were talking again about the deepest possible change, a change in character ... without this change the condition will continue.

I got a t-shirt that I wear at meetings sometimes, and it says on it "If nothing changes, nothing changes." Think about it. And I've heard people say, you know "if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." If you don't change, nothing changes. Character can't be changed by thought. One spiritual teacher said it real clear: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?

Nor can character be changed by prayer alone. Neither can affirmations nor positive input from other change it. Because the problem with which we are dealing is rooted in self hate. Hear that: self hate. The problem didn't come from others. The problem can't be solved by others. You can be helped by others. *The solution must come from you. You've got to do the work.* I've got to do the work. Thought can't alter it. I remember one of the people who'd mess with me when I first came around AA was Grumpy, ya'll heard me talk about Grumpy and he was always sayin', "Boy you can't think your way into good livin', you've got to live your way into good thinkin'.

Prayer. One of my favorite stories ... there was a rabbi and a priest went to a prize fight and before the fight one of the boys got down in the corner and did this ... and the rabbi says to the priest "that's one of your boys, isn't it?" he said, "yeah." He said, "Tell me, what does that mean?" Priest said "It don't mean a damn thing if he can't fight."

James said it in another way in the New Testament: Faith without works is dead. Affirmation is positive input from others -- bounce off of it. I remember my experience with a psychologist a little Jewish guy named Shapiro, I loved that little guy, he was just beautiful and he loved me to death. He was a hypnotist ... a hypnotherapist ... now you can't hypnotize an alcoholic, he ain't gonna give up control -- but he would try his best ... and he could get me in a light trance, and he knew how I felt about myself and he's tryin' to change that by sayin' nice things to me and he just tell me all this good stuff, and one day he says, "You're a mensch!" And in Yiddish that means "a man in the biggest sense of the word. That's a hell of a thing.

And from a deep trance know what I said to him: Bullshit. He gave up on me. He said, "Go back to Alcoholics Anonymous ... that's what you believe in, that's what's gonna help you, and he was right. There's gotta be more, and that more is sustained action on proven principles and we know what they are ... taken by the person himself.

Character can be changed only by action. It's a spiritual program, ya'll ... not based on thought and feelings, it's based on action. And the change I'm talkin' about is based on self-hate to unconditional self-love. I don't want to use the word "self esteem" because it's been beat to death now a days. You watch one of these talk shows -- you either need counseling or you lack self-esteem. It's been beat to death. You know it's been spread so wide it means nothing any more.

How about unconditional self-love? It can never be gained from outside yourself. It can be aided and reinforced by other people must be borne and grow within the person himself -- again self-love is self-love. I was talkin' to Bob earlier I can't believe these people who say you can't love other until you love yourself. I loved everybody before I loved me.

The word on me was: Don't ask Tom for the shirt off your back, hell give it to you – but don't you ever try to give him yours.

Let's look at how you can get emotionally sober. It's tough, I'll tell you that right now, and it hangs on a long time. Let me tell you how long. The lady in Alabama knows me really well, and I did a pitch down at the Alabama School of Alcohol and Drugs a couple years ago and the folks went wild. They sold more tapes than they sold in the history of the school. And she got the evaluations, you know ... and I went down there, and I was sittin' across her desk and the evaluation is on a sheet that can reach from here to the door, you know a print out ... and nine hundred and somethin' evaluations and she handed it to me. She said, "I've already marked the two negative ones so you don't have to look for 'em."

The very key to the whole thong is to accept yourself as you are right now. Really acceptance, you see, stops that inner struggle, it puts you in neutral – you ain't runnin' ... you ain't fightin' ... you in neutral – I accept. Psychologist Carl Rogers ... "Curious paradox," he said ... "is the moment I accept myself just as I am, then I begin to change." How about our alcoholism, is that true?

Kris Kristofferson had a song once called "The Pilgrim," and the chorus of the song said: "He's a poet, no he's a picker, he's a profit, no he's a pusher, he's a pilgrim and a preacher and a problem when he's stoned, he's a walking contradiction, partly truth and partly fiction, taking every wrong direction on his lonely way back home."

Each of us, I submit to you, is exactly that: a walking contradiction. A combination of light, and darkness. Recovery does not eliminate the darkness. Rather it increases the light – and decreases the darkness. Nothing is added, nothing is taken away. The balance changes. That deepest self which I believe with Bob *is* God, begins to manifest itself in this darkness, until it outweighs the other -- but I don't think the darkness is ever gone.

There's nothing I'm ever gonna do in my life that my ego is not gonna be involved in. Nothin'. I don't believe. And I have to accept that. That's hard for a perfectionist, you hear me? It's imperative to accept all that is you. This is rigorous honesty. I'm sayin' with Popeye, "I am what I am, and that's all that I am." That's rigorous honesty to me. It's a state of being. Acceptance of self ends the internal conflict involved in trying to hide some of yourself. I read somewhere the alcoholic's very much the actor – to the outer world he presents his stage character – this is the one he wants other to see, etcetera, etcetera.

Next thing is surrender. But in a different sense. We often look at surrender as passive acceptance of our condition. The program goes further than that. There's another aspect of surrender called sacrifice. Third Step prayer begins how? "God I offer myself to thee." If that ain't sacrifice, I ain't ever heard it.

Sacrifice what? Yourself to God. Sacrifice these big needs that I have ... I guess ya'll don't have 'em ... the need to control. The need to possess. The need to understand. The need to always

be right. The need to be comfortable. All of which depends on the above. Sacrifice unrealistic expectations of self and others. Sacrifice 'em. Unhealthy dependencies. Sacrifice the idea that you can change without help – any kind of help. If you have to find you a Jewish psychologist, do it. Watch them Baptist psychologists, though. Sacrifice, listen, your exaggerated sense of self-importance.

Remember rule number 62? Don't take yourself too damn seriously. Sacrifice the values and beliefs of alcoholism. The values based on pleasure. Not on what is right or wrong or moral. The values that are based only on pleasure – whose pleasure?! – MY pleasure! Those self-centered selfish values that are killers for you and killers for me and take life and never give it. Think you haven't got 'em? Watch your behavior.

There's an old timer in the program up in Charlotte used to say, "Count yourself up every night and see how many you really are." Got to believe – got to believe that with help you can and will become emotionally sober. Beliefs are powerful. Positive beliefs can be just as powerful as those negative beliefs. They also can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Look at Step Two. If you can say that you're even willing to believe, you're on your way. Positive beliefs are just as powerful, perhaps more powerful, than negative beliefs. I remember there was a line when the guy was thankin' the carpenter for making him well. He says, "Don't thank me, your faith has made you whole." Your faith.

Next, examine yourself – oh God, here we go again. Become aware of false beliefs about yourself ... their origin if possible, but if you can't find the origin don't worry about it. Just deal with them as they are. Discover and become familiar with your behavior patterns which are based on false beliefs and fear.

Don't isolate. Be with others like yourself as often as you can. Join in and introduce yourself. Why? It's the first thing you'll hear me say Sunday morning my sponsor ever told me to go to meetings early and shake everybody's hand and ask how they were doing and I did not want to go. But it became a vitally important part of my sobriety, because I connected. I became a part of the "we" and I totally believe that if I can move along this horizontal line and connect with my brother and my sister,

God's gonna join in on that. And right there in that intersection, where God comes down and joins us is everything I've ever hoped for or wished for. It is one of those peak experiences. Talk with somebody else about what you've found. You've got to have somebody you can talk with. Familiarize him or her with your behavior patterns.

And ask him or her to help you watch for them. That takes some guts. These things happen unconsciously and automatically. And when they happen would you please say: "You're doin' it ... you're doin' it." Ask God to help you change ... to remove your fear, your false beliefs, your self-hate ... help you accept and forgive yourself. Or if you want to make the prayer real simple, just say: God, thy will be done!

And this assumes to be true what it says on page 133 in the Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous: "We are sure that God wants us to be happy and joyous and free. Hallowed is his name. Nothing bad can come from one who is hallowed. His will is all. God if I could get that through here ... all the time!

Perhaps the most important element in overcoming emotional unsobriety is to watch for its manifestations. Watch for behavior patterns. Watch for those responses. You ever look at Step 10? Step 10 says we continue to what? Watch ... watch ... huh, isn't that the word? Watching is an ancient, time honored spiritual tradition. It means observe yourself! As those monks in the desert used to say when one of 'em would get troubled: Brother pay attention to yourself. Uncritical self-observation. When? Now! Now tonight. Watch for the manifestations. They're like old tapes, remember? You can't erase 'em. You can't open up the tape deck and throw your character away. You've got to change the message.

So when the message starts playin' "you did a good job" --- "well, I don't" ... STOP ... and say simply, "Thank you. I'm glad you noticed I did do a good job." See. Bob V. ... you heard his name in vain probably. I'm gonna use it in vain again. Bob said to me one time, "You know what the greatest thing in the world is for an alcoholic, Tom?" I said, "No." He says, "When somebody says they love you and you say, "Yeah, I know you do." He said, "When an alcoholic can accept love, that's the greatest thing on the face of the earth."

You know I think he was right. When the old message begins we continue to watch for what? Selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear – *when these arise*. Put a new message on it. You know if you put a new message over the old message long enough, the new message becomes the only message.

Watch, also – boy this will help – for the good things that you do. Ain't nothin' wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with balance. I always believed I had to be all good or all bad, and that's the way I judged myself. Nothing wrong with balance. I don't know what it is – but there's nothin' wrong with it.

Watch for the good things you do. And when you see 'em, say, "Thank you, God." I dare you. During this day when you're watching yourself for these behavior patterns, watch also for the good things that happen to you and for you that you don't have anything to do with. You get the right word, the right letter, the right phone call, the right thought, the right touch, the right mountain, the right tree – and you don't have to define grace. You're touched by it. You know what it is. God working twenty-four hours a day – for our good. And we're unconscious of it, unless we're awake, and observant.

Finally, give to others what you want and need. Give to others what *you* want and need. Love others unconditionally. It's hard stuff, isn't it? Give without expectation! Give anonymously. Giving in this sense, you know, is what love's all about. You know the 13th chapter first Corinthians, the word that is used for love in there is not "agape" ... not "eros" ... not "fulon" ... not "flao" ... The word used is "cerise," which we translate as charity. The greatest of these

then is what? Giving ... giving what” What is freely been given to you. Giving in this way makes you feel good.

Now, if you'll do these things you'll discover a great law of life – it's in the Big Book never comes out and says it – it's called karma by some people. And the great law of life says this: What I give, is what I get. What I do to you, I do to me. We are intimately connected with one another. What goes around, comes around. Put it on the wheel, it'll come back to you. The very essence of becoming emotionally sober is the realization that Chuck C. used to say: that this is a giving life, and it's only through giving that I may receive. And the truth has been stated in so many ways. Be not deceived, God is not mocked for that what you sow that shall you reap. Cast your bread upon the water and they will return to you. Cast ... give ... sow ... give. Or how about this one: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry -- give -- this message to other alcoholics.

It is, in fact, through giving that we receive, so what we want for ourselves we must give others ... without expectation. Does that mean that if I go to you and I give you a gift that you're gonna return that gift? No. It means that the giving itself will return to me, and I've probably already forgotten the original gift if I gave without expectation, because if I give in that sense the reward is in the giving.

Tell you somethin' that happened today ... it's just an aside, but ... I went to the ticket counter in Charlotte, and I ride in coach class ... and I say to the lady at the counter: “You're not havin' a good day, are you?” She says, “How do you know that?” I say, “You look like you're real tired ...” “Oh well, no, I'm not havin' a good day. You're very observant. And she told me what was wrong ... like I'd known her forever. And I stood there and listened to her and I said, “Well you can either that man for the rest of the day or you can pray for him every time you think of him, your choice.” She looked at me kinda funny ... said, “You're an understanding man, I'm gonna put you in first class.” True story.

So ... I thank you and let me leave you with this: Every letter I write I end it in this way: Take care, and please remember to be gentle with yourself and those around you. Thank you.