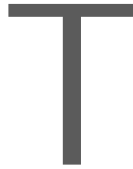


Letting Go Rather Than Hanging On



*Hope is really a form of blessing.
To bless is to increase, to allow something
to unfold in its fullness.
To hope is to create a sacred space,
a space of possibility, in which the goodness of the
Universe can express itself.
The stance we adopt in that sacred space is one of
readiness, openness and non-attachment to
a particular outcome.*

- Joan Borysenko

Spiritual stressors are stressors that activate those parts of your self that are fear-based, ego-based, and attachment-based. When a spiritual stressor is active, it goads you into forsaking your relationship with your Higher Power for the comfort and familiarity of your willfulness. An activated spiritual stressor fuels your sense of entitlement, grandiosity, and self-centeredness when what you need more than anything is to remain grounded to a spirit of humility and service. When you're feeling most disconnected from your self, the people in your life, and your Higher Power you can bet that a spiritual stressor is hard at work deep within you.

Spiritual stressors are the catalyst for the dissolution of your spiritual practice. They test your resolve to live by faith in your Higher Power rather than by the might of your will. Spiritual stressors are forever seducing you to come back to *your true god*, alcohol and other drugs. Spiritual stressors spew forth their propaganda, sweet-talking and enticing you to give up the ways of Recovery, enough of this one day at a time—for tomorrow not only won't get better, it can only get worse.

In this chapter we'll examine three spiritual stressors that are critical for you to be mindful of, for they're toxic to your emotional and spiritual well-being. Given free reign, these stressors will quickly activate the process of relapse. The spiritual stressors we'll examine are:

Pathfinder's Checklist

Stressors that may adversely affect your spiritual well-being.

- 1) Powerlessness

- 2) Hopelessness
- 3) Pride

The first spiritual stressor we'll discuss is *powerlessness*. This is the granddaddy of all spiritual stressors. Powerlessness is not only activated by your relationship with alcohol and other drugs but by the people and circumstances of your life as well.

Powerlessness is not something that you gladly experience must less willingly acknowledge. Think about why that might be so. What does the admission of powerlessness mean to you? There are some people who equate the admission of powerlessness with an admission of being weak or inadequate. For others, admitting that they're powerless is admitting defeat by the object over which they're powerless. Still for others, the admission of powerlessness is an admission that there are limits as to who and what they are as people as well as what they can influence.

What does the experience of powerlessness awaken within you? Perhaps a feeling of being out of control? Vulnerable? Overwhelmed with fear? Engulfed in shame and a sense of worthlessness? How do you react to feeling out of control, vulnerable, or frightened? If you're like most people, it's likely that you seek to protect yourself from both feeling and being powerless.

How do you protect yourself from experiencing powerlessness? There are two ways. The first way to protect yourself from experiencing powerlessness is to attempt to gain control by imposing your willfulness on the object that has stimulated feelings of powerlessness. A second way to protect yourself from the experience of powerless-

ness is to [re]connect with a power greater than your self and to turn it over to that Higher Power.

That's the choice that confronts you when you're feeling powerless. Rely on willfulness and shoot your way out of the situation or your relationship with your Higher Power and surrender your way out of the situation. Let's first discuss those two choices in regards to your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

The more out of control your consumption of alcohol and other drugs had become, the more powerless over your consumption of alcohol and other drugs you became. The more powerless over your consumption of alcohol and other drugs that you became, the more you tried to gain control over your consumption of alcohol and other drugs by relying on your willfulness to attempt to regain control. The more your loss of control escalated, the more you relied on willfulness as the means by which you attempted to regain control of your escalating out of control consumption of alcohol and other drugs. After all, why cop to being powerless over alcohol and other drugs when you could seek refuge in the myth that your will could control the uncontrollable?

As a result, you used acts of willfulness rather than acts of surrender to attempt to gain control over your out of control consumption of alcohol and other drugs. But making your willfulness the god of your existence only got you more loss of control combined with your self-will run riot. To remain abstinent, you must acknowledge that you're powerless over ALL alcohol and other drugs and rely on your relationship with your Higher Power rather than your willfulness.

Powerlessness isn't activated solely by your relation-

ship with alcohol and other drugs. Powerlessness exists in your relationship with the people and circumstances of your life. From sunrise to sunset every day of your life you encounter the limits of your influence over people and circumstances. Daily you're reminded of your own limitations as you make mistakes, feel overwhelmed by a child who won't listen, a co-worker who won't cooperate, a life partner who won't communicate, and/or a loved one hell bent on their own private path of destructiveness.

Daily you're reminded of your frailties as you encounter people who wound you deeply, impersonal events that turn your world inside out, and hostile people who mean you only harm. Daily you're brought to your knees as your tales of woe fall on deaf ears, your well-meaning advice gets filed in the garbage can, and your belief that you've built a better mouse trap is mocked by those who refuse to follow your direction.

What do these daily encounters with the experience of powerlessness stimulate within you? How do you respond to the people in your world that go right every time you ask them to go left? What emotions get activated when the world marches to the beat of a drum other than yours? How do you deal with it? How do you engage the contrarian energy that pushes against your own wants, needs, desires, hopes, and expectations?

Do you arch your back and return fire? Dig in for the long haul, pitting your will against the will of others? Do you cling to your ways and your expectations all in the misguided expectation that your will shall be served?

And if you do as I have suggested and more, what impact does the application of your willfulness have on your emotional and spiritual well-being? What impact

does your blind loyalty to your will have on your abstinence? What is it about humbling yourself and acknowledging that you're powerless over substances, people, places, and circumstances that you resist?

What's the solution to making peace with the fact that the most fundamental truth about your relationship with life—whether it be with alcohol and other drugs, or people, or random circumstances—is that you're completely and utterly powerless? We're back to the idea that surrender is a mightier sword than blind willfulness. There's just no getting away from the need to *Let Go and Let God* in every aspect of your life.

Which brings us to your relationship with your Higher Power rather than your willfulness as a way of coping with the experience of powerlessness. When you rely on willfulness rather than a relationship with your Higher Power, you're forsaking faith in the unknown for the feeling of relief that you experience from imposing your will on life. You're choosing the right of your might rather than the serenity of turning it over to a power greater than your self. You lead with your chin, daring the world to take you on rather than surrendering in humility to a power greater than your self. Do you cling desperately to the misguided notion that claiming your powerlessness is admitting to being weak and infirmed? Is your reliance on your willfulness merely a means by which you avoid experiencing your essential humanness—powerless over all substances, people, and circumstances?

Willfulness is false courage. It's merely bluff and bravado. Going it alone, relying on nothing more than your wits and guile may enable you to survive but does such a method of coping empower you to live. The

answer my friend is to find the courage to turn it over, tolerating the anxiety created by letting it go, and humbling yourself by surrendering control to a power greater than your self.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Coping with the discomfort of feeling powerless

- 1) Attend Recovery-based support group meetings
- 2) Become part of a Recovery-based support system
- 3) Ask someone to be your Recovery-based mentor known as a sponsor
- 4) Work the 12 steps of a Twelve Step program
- 5) Communicate with your Higher Power
- 6) Develop a daily spiritual practice
- 7) Develop the habit of asking for help
- 8) Do volunteer or service work
- 9) Maintain daily contact with members of your Recovery-based support system
- 10) Practice rigorous honesty in all of your affairs
- 11) Do the next right thing

Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Write about or discuss three people in your life whom you're powerless over.
- 2) Write about or discuss how you use willfulness as a way of trying to regain control over each of the three people identified in step #1 of this exercise.
- 3) Write about or discuss what impact your use of willfulness identified in step #2 of this exercise has on your Recovery-based lifestyle and on your

abstinence.

- 4) Write about or discuss how using your relationship with your Higher Power may enable you to cope with the powerlessness you identified in step #1.
- 5) Write about or discuss three circumstances in your life that you're powerless over.
- 6) Write about or discuss how you use willfulness as a way of trying to regain control over each of the three circumstances identified in step #5.
- 7) Write about or discuss what impact your use of willfulness identified in step #6 has on your Recovery-based lifestyle and on your abstinence.
- 8) Write about or discuss how using your relationship with your Higher Power may enable you to cope with the powerlessness you identified in step #5.

The second spiritual stressor that you'll encounter is *hopelessness*. Hopelessness erodes your faith, silences your voice, and paralyzes your spirit. Hopelessness undermines your belief in your Higher Power. Hopelessness ultimately chips away at your resolve to remain abstinent.

Hopelessness is born out of the discouragement that you feel when you're unable to trust that things are unfolding as they should. Hopelessness evolves out of your belief that the events in the universe should occur when and where you desire. Hopelessness grows in an atmosphere of impatience and fear. You're impatient for what you want to occur to occur as well as overwhelmed by the fear that what you want to occur will never occur.

Hopelessness is a reflection of your displeasure with experiencing struggle in your life. But struggle you will and struggle you must. For the muscles of Recovery can

only be developed out of the struggle born from disappointment, frustration, and disillusionment. For every circumstance is a test, every event offers a lesson, and each and every moment challenges you to choose not only what to do but what to think about what has and hasn't occurred.

You see for every circumstance that makes you more vulnerable to feeling hopeless you can always choose faith in the workings of the universe and your Higher Power. For every circumstance that overwhelms you with disappointment, you can always choose gratitude for a lesson offered and received. For every circumstance that overwhelms you with frustration, you can always choose to align with rather than resist the unfolding plans of your Higher Power.

That's what hopelessness breeds—fear, lack of vision, and resistance to a way other than yours. Hopelessness makes you turn inward to comfort yourself rather than outward to receive the encouragement of a power greater than your self. Turning inward, you cut yourself off from the balm that relieves hopelessness—love and support.

Therein lies the solution to feeling hopeless. Not questioning the ways of the Universe. Not blaming your Higher Power for not fulfilling what you've prayed for. Not questioning the wisdom of others brought into your life to guide you. But trusting in the workings of the Universe and your Higher Power. Opening yourself to the comfort of others. Creating serenity through prayer and meditation. Remaining on the path to a more hopeful tomorrow rather than retreating into self-destructive ways of relieving your pain.

But there's more for you to rely on when you feel

hopeless. Remember the old adage, *One day at a time*. Remind yourself that you're not going to get it all back in a day, in a month, or even a year. You're in this for the long-haul and the only way to successfully navigate the long-haul is to take things one day at a time.

The last antidote for hopelessness is yet another saying in the Twelve Step community, *This is a program of spiritual progression not perfection*. You get the point? Progress is the only outcome you can reasonably expect. To think that you're going to get this all right, all at once, all how you want it to be is a set-up for feeling hopeless. Celebrate your progress while letting go of your need to have things unfold perfectly.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Steps to relieve hopelessness.

- 1) Contact a member of your Recovery-based support system
- 2) Go to a Recovery-based support group meeting
- 3) Take a quiet time
- 4) Communicate with your Higher Power
- 5) Read an inspirational passage from a book
- 6) Perform an inspirational meditation or visualization
- 7) Identify three things that you feel gratitude for
- 8) Do volunteer or service work
- 9) Identify the fears you have of following the path the universe provides for you rather than the one you envision.

Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Identify three circumstances in your life that make you feel hopeless.
- 2) Identify the expectations for your outcome that you've imposed on each circumstance identified in step #1.
- 3) Identify at least one lesson that you're resisting to learn from each circumstance that you've identified in step #1.
- 4) Identify the expectations that you need to let go of in order to accept the presence of each circumstance identified in step #1.
- 5) Identify the fear(s) that you have about letting go of each expectation identified in step #4.
- 6) Identify how your emotional and spiritual well-being will be affected by letting go of the expectations that you've identified in step #4.

The third spiritual stressor that you'll encounter is *pride*, or *a sense of uniqueness and self-importance*. Pride is that part of you that maintains the belief that there's something uniquely special about you. Pride is born out of the intertwined characteristics of self-centeredness, entitlement, and grandiosity.

Pride serves as a mask, hiding your sense of shame from the rest of the world, preventing the world from discovering what you've known about yourself all along—how frightened, vulnerable, and fragile you feel.

Pride is the source of much of the turmoil that exists in your relationships. Pride is the skin in the phrase, *thin-skinned*. It avenges every perceived wrong that you expe-

rience. It keeps you from turning the other cheek. Pride eggs you on—fanning your desire to prove others wrong, taking delight in being right, forever placing the preservation of your frail sense of self above the dignity of others.

Pride is what you place between you and being vulnerable. Pride is what puffs you up when you're feeling small and at risk. It's the smirk in a sarcastic remark. It's the twinkle in your eye when you've done it again to that special somebody. Pride is the joy in your heart when you have elevated yourself by stepping on the backs of others.

Pride is the rationale that you use to remain true to your ways rather than surrender to the ways of the universe. Pride plays in your head as follows, "I'm not as bad as those people who..." "I'm not like those people who..." "I don't need meetings as much as ..." "I'm different from..." "Those rules may apply to everybody else but not to me..."

Pride is born out of an affliction that I refer to as *unique-e-itis*. Unique-e-itis is an affliction in which a person believes that they're uniquely special in the extreme. Unique-e-itis is what gives birth to the notion that there's the program and then there's MY PROGRAM. Unique-e-itis is the justification that you rely on when you cut corners and do things YOUR WAY rather than the way. You know that phrase, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander?" Well, that's not true in the land of those people who are afflicted with unique-e-itis.

Pride poses a serious threat to your abstinence. Pride maintains your separateness from the human race. Pride keeps you disconnected from your Higher Power. Pride prevents you from surrendering. Pride precludes you

from becoming an active member of a Recovery-based support system. Pride prevents you from practicing HOW—Honesty—Openness—Willingness.

When pride is activated, you struggle mightily not to lose face. By turning innocent discussions into heated debates, pride prevents you from ever risking the appearance of being wrong and unknowing. Pride inflates your sense of importance while diminishing everybody else. As a result you're convinced that no one has anything to offer you. This becomes a primary point of resistance to you listening to others.

When pride is activated within you, you fight for your rights—no matter how self-destructive those rights may be. Look at the last five contentious interactions that you've had with the people in your life. What role has pride played in stirring the pot? What were you fighting for? What exactly was it that you were afraid to let go of? What was it that you were clinging so tenaciously to when you were desperately trying to save face?

There's an antidote for pride. But it's not just cutting the crap. It's not just learning how to play well with others. It's not just living the phrase, if you have nothing good to say then don't say anything at all. That would be too simple. The antidote for pride is much more difficult of an undertaking—something which the mere thought of can turn your stomach inside out. For the antidote for pride is humility.

Humility is simply the act of accepting the fact that you're human. Humility is the act of taking your place in this world amongst the common folk. In so doing you're accepting your essential goodness as a human being—not better than, certainly not worse than anyone else.

Humility is the act of acknowledging your humanness. In so doing you're accepting that you're extraordinarily ordinary—neither king of the world nor scum of the earth. There's neither shame nor grandiosity in humility—only a loving sense of who you are and being at peace with that knowledge.

Humility is the act of acknowledging that your choices have consequences and that those consequences often adversely affect other people. And in so acknowledging to yourself the consequences of your actions, you make amends for those actions to the people you've harmed.

Humility is the act of acknowledging that a power greater than your self exists. But more than acknowledging the existence of this Higher Power, you turn your will over to your Higher Power. This means that you place a greater importance on the act of surrender than on the act of willfulness.

Humility is the act of acknowledging that you have limits. But more than acknowledge that you have limits, you live each moment of your life in a manner that accepts rather than attempts to exceed those limits.

Humility is the act of acknowledging that you need to be actively involved with a community of people. But more than acknowledge that fact, you live your life that way. Humility places the need for connection above your desire for separateness.

Humility is the act of acknowledging the rights of all people to be treated in an honoring way that preserves their dignity. In so acknowledging that fact, you place the needs of other people on a par with your needs.

Pathfinder's Checklist

Action steps to create humility in your life

- 1) Communicate with your Higher Power
- 2) Meditate
- 3) Perform service work
- 4) Attend Recovery-based support group meetings
- 5) Work the Twelve Steps of a Twelve Step program
- 6) Make amends to those you have harmed
- 7) Acknowledge those things in your life that you have gratitude for
- 8) Act in a forgiving way to those who've harmed you

Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Identify at least three relationships in which your pride has adversely affected each relationship.
- 2) Identify how your pride has affected each relationship identified in step #1.
- 3) Identify the impact the consequences identified in step #2 of this exercise has had on your abstinence.
- 4) Identify what you have to accept about yourself in order to live in humility rather than pride as it pertains to each relationship identified in step #1.
- 5) Identify what adverse consequences of your prideful behavior that you need to make amends for to each person identified in step #1.

Your emotional and spiritual well-being is predicated in part on how you react to the people and circumstances of your life. For no matter who the person is, no matter

what the circumstances are, no matter what the sins that you've committed might be, and no matter the misdeeds that others may have committed against you, you have a choice as to how you will respond.

I hope that you're beginning to recognize that responding with willfulness rather than surrender only begets *more* rather than *less* powerlessness. I hope that you're beginning to see that responding with hopelessness rather than trust, faith, and patience only begets more hopelessness. I hope that you're beginning to see that responding with pride rather than humility only begets more turmoil, conflict, and alienation.

Choosing surrender, faith, trust, and humility as responses to the moment-to-moment circumstances of your life enables you to reduce your sense of struggle and lessen the amount of stress that you're experiencing. But more than lessening your struggle and reducing your stress, choosing surrender, faith, trust, and humility strengthen your bond with your Higher Power and thereby lessens the compulsion to go back out there and consume alcohol and other drugs. And that, my friend, is the point of this exercise!