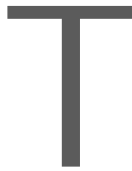


Chapter 6

**Emotional Well-being:  
Making Peace With Yourself and  
the People in Your Life**



*I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother,  
but to fight my greatest enemy - myself.*

-Native American Proverb

*An important part* of [re]constructing a Recovery-based lifestyle is healing the pain and conflict of your life. You can most effectively heal your pain and conflict by opening your heart to a lifetime of accumulated sorrow. As you open your heart to your pain and sorrow you'll discover over time that your pain and sorrow will transform into acceptance and forgiveness.

Although there's much for you to work through, in time you'll discover the gift of compassion and love for who you are and what you have done. That's where your work must begin—forgiving yourself for who you are and letting yourself off the hook for who you are not.

But your pain is also born from the wounds that you've experienced at the hands of the people in your life. You've carried around a lifetime of pain caused by other's words and deeds. Not only have their words and actions caused you harm but the unresolved resentment that you hold towards them has imprisoned your spirit in animosity and bitterness.

So in this chapter we'll examine the fourth element of the psychological building block of a Recovery-based lifestyle—*emotional well-being*. Although there are any number of ingredients that contribute to your overall emotional well-being, in this chapter we'll focus on the following three elements:

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*Three elements of your emotional well-being.*

- 1) Acceptance
- 2) Forgiveness
- 3) Patience

Let's first discuss *acceptance*. When I refer to acceptance, I'm referring to accepting yourself for who you are. And what you must accept first and foremost right now is that you're a chemically dependent individual. Although you may know that with your head, have you accepted that fact with your heart? Have you embraced not only with your mind, but, with your heart and soul, the fact that you're chemically dependent?

Or do you hold judgments about yourself because you're powerless over alcohol and other drugs? Do you feel shame in the pit of your stomach about the fact that you're unable to consume alcohol and other drugs like *normal people*? When you look at yourself in the mirror and say, "Hi. My name is... I am chemically dependent," does the face in the mirror lovingly smile back at you or fade away in a desperate attempt to disappear?

When you look at yourself in the mirror and acknowledge that you're powerless over alcohol and other drugs, that your life has become unmanageable, and that a power greater than your self exists, who's that person that's staring back at you? A weak person who lacks strength of character? A morally depraved individual who neither knows nor cares about the difference between right and wrong? A willful person determined to get over on anyone and everyone, no matter the cost, no matter the consequence? A person with an addictive personality who's a prisoner of one's impulses and character traits?

Or when you look into the mirror do you see the terror that lives and breathes in your heart and soul? Do you see a person who has been beaten down to the point that that person no longer cares about what happens to them? Do you sense the emptiness that permeates your soul, the

desperation that colors the tone of your skin?

When you look at that person staring back at you are you able to feel the same compassion for yourself that you would feel for any other person afflicted with a disease or do you cling to your contempt for being weak and bad? Are you able to feel the same love for yourself that you would feel for any other soul who has lost their way or do you dismiss yourself as insignificant and unworthy? Are you able to extend to yourself the same kindness and mercy that you would extend to any other desperate person who takes desperate measures to medicate the pain that spiritual bankruptcy activates or do you belittle yourself for lacking character and discipline?

To accept yourself for who you are means that you accept first and foremost that you have a disease. You're not weak, morally corrupt, or lacking in character. Release yourself from your judgments. Stop the self-berating. Cease the belittlement. Refuse to be caught one more time in the swirl of a shame spiral.

Treat yourself with compassion, mercy, kindness, and love. Forgive yourself for the things you've said and deeds you've done. Stop investing energy in the endless cycle of shaming yourself because you're chemically dependent. Offer yourself what you would offer anybody afflicted with a disease—dignity, respect, and an open heart.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*Common judgments that individuals hold against themselves because they're chemically dependent.*

- 1) I am a bad person.
- 2) I am a weak person.

- 3) I am beyond redemption.
- 4) I am morally depraved.
- 5) I lack sufficient willpower.
- 6) I am an uncaring person.
- 7) I am selfish.
- 8) I am unlovable.
- 9) I am worthless.
- 10) I am undeserving of happiness and well-being.
- 11) I am beyond redemption.
- 12) I am inadequate

## Pathfinder's Exercise

*Write a letter of acceptance to yourself.*

*In this letter focus on the following:*

- 1) Identify at least three judgments that you hold against yourself about being chemically dependent.
- 2) Identify at least three judgments that you hold against yourself for the acts that you committed while active in your disease.
- 3) Identify what prevents you from letting go of the judgments identified in steps #1 and #2 of this exercise.
- 4) Identify how you would have to think of yourself once you let go of those judgments identified in steps #1 and #2 of this exercise.
- 5) Identify the comfort or discomfort you would have thinking about yourself in the way that you identified in step #4 of this exercise.
- 6) Write a statement of compassion to counter each judgment identified in steps #1 and #2 of this exercise.

- 7) Write a statement of understanding to counter each judgment identified in steps #1 and #2.
- 8) Write a statement of love to counter each judgment identified in steps #1 and #2 of this exercise.
- 9) Write a statement of acceptance to counter each judgment identified in steps #1 and #2.
- 10) Write a statement of forgiveness to counter each judgment identified in steps #1 and #2.

*Forgiveness* is the second element of your emotional well-being. When I refer to forgiveness, I'm referring to forgiving those individuals who you *perceived* have harmed you. Why is forgiving those individuals who you perceived to have harmed you an important element of your emotional well-being? Why must you suffer the indignity of someone else's words or actions and then turn around and *forgive them*? Why must you suffer insult and then do the work of forgiving somebody who you perceived to have caused you harm? Why must you go the extra mile to forgive somebody for something they may not even have acknowledged they've done to you?

The answer to each and every question that I've just posed is simple enough. The harm you inflict on yourself as a result of *not* forgiving others for the transgressions that they've committed against you, both real and imagined, is far more injurious to your emotional and spiritual well-being than anything that anybody could do to you! "How can that be?" you may be asking of yourself.

Simply stated, perceived wrongs that go unforgiven, hurt that festers as a result of your unwillingness to let go of your pain and suffering, crimes and misdemeanors committed against you that you pin on your chest like a

badge of honor only serve to provoke a deep and dark feeling of *resentment* towards those who you perceive to have done you wrong. And as you may already know, resentments are a luxury that a chemically dependent individual can ill-afford to have.

Resentments are like acid that *eat* away at the core of your emotional and spiritual well-being. There's an old saying about resentments—*Having a resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die*. Resentments embitter you towards the human race. They suck you dry of compassion, kindness, and acceptance of others. Resentments are like sponges that *absorb* your good-will leaving you with nothing but a mixture of hostility, aggression, and animosity.

Resentments alienate you from the people who have caused you harm. The more resentment you feel the less connected you are with the people in your life. The more cut-off you become from the people in your life, the more at risk you are for relapse.

Resentments feed on other feelings—exacerbating them and making them larger than life. Have you ever tried this cocktail before—one part resentment, two parts hopelessness, and one part despair? Put that combination in your blender and drink it up and see how eager you are to take on the day. Let that witch's brew simmer within and see how willing you are to open yourself up to other people. Soak your desire to remain abstinent in that concoction and see how much longer you'll stay committed to your daily Recovery-based routines.

To release yourself from the stranglehold of your resentments it's helpful to understand the genesis of your resentments. There's an old saying that goes something

like this, *An expectation is a premeditated resentment*. Now think about this expression for a moment. If you examine your resentments, you'll find buried beneath your self-righteous indignation, more times than not, some expectation that did not get met.

Now undoubtedly there will be times that insensitive people will simply do insensitive things to you. Other times you will be the victim of random occurrences. But if you look long enough and deep enough at the circumstance that was the source of the resentment you're experiencing, you might discover that there's some stated or unstated expectation that you have that has not been met in a particular situation.

Do you see the importance of acknowledging that your expectations are the cause of most of your resentments? Do you see the opportunity you have for catching things before they even occur? Simply identifying your hidden agenda, becoming aware of the expectations that you impose on the circumstances in your life, can enable you to nip things in the bud before a resentment ever develops? By no longer imposing your expectation on a circumstance or by letting go of your expectations in a particular circumstance, you'll be disappointed less and therefore not saddled with so many resentments.

However, you're not going to always get it right. You're not always going to be able to sanitize your experiences of your expectations. And expectations won't always be the cause of the resentments that you're experiencing. That's why your willingness to forgive those people who you perceive to have wronged you is so important to your emotional well-being. To help familiarize yourself with some common expectations that we

all impose on life, I've provided you with the following Pathfinder's Checklist. Beneath the checklist, you'll find an exercise to help you structure the act of forgiveness.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

*Common expectations that people impose on the circumstances of their life.*

- 1) I should never have to follow rules.
- 2) I should never be inconvenienced.
- 3) I should always be in control of a situation.
- 4) I should always get my way.
- 5) I should get what I want when I want it.
- 6) People should never disagree with me.
- 7) People should never criticize me.
- 8) People should never show me up.
- 9) People should treat me as if I were important.
- 10) People should always treat me fairly.
- 11) People should treat me the way I want to be treated.
- 12) People should always help me.
- 13) People should always approve of me.
- 14) People should always admire me.
- 15) People should rescue me.
- 16) People should insure my emotional and/or physical comfort.
- 17) People should let me slide even when I've acted irresponsibly.
- 18) People should know what I want without me having to ask them for it.
- 19) People should not hold me accountable for my actions and my words.

- 20) People should always treat me the way I treat them.

## Pathfinder's Exercise

*Write a letter of forgiveness to those against whom you hold a resentment. In this letter focus on the following:*

- 1) Identify at least three resentments that you're currently feeling towards another person(s).
- 2) Identify the unmet expectation(s) that's the source of each resentment identified in step #1.
- 3) Identify the fear(s) you have of releasing each person identified in step #1 from the expectation(s) identified in step #2.
- 4) Identify another feeling you could choose to feel towards the object of each resentment identified in step #1.
- 5) Identify what you would need to let go of in order to transform the feeling of resentment to the feeling identified in step #4.
- 6) Identify the fear you have of letting go of what you identified in step #5 in order to transform the feeling of resentment into the feeling identified in step #4.
- 7) Identify the impact that holding on to each resentment identified in step #1 has on your Recovery-based lifestyle.
- 8) Identify the impact that holding on to each resentment identified in step #1 has on your abstinence.
- 9) Identify the impact that holding on to each resentment identified in step #1 has on your spiritual practice.

- 10) Write a short prayer of well-being for each person identified in step #1.
- 11) Recite to yourself each prayer that you wrote in step #10 at the start of and the end of each day for a minimum of fourteen straight days or as long as it takes for you to let go of the resentment.

*Patience* is the third element of your emotional well-being. *One day at a day, Easy does it, This is a program of spiritual progression not perfection* are but a few of the messages that the Twelve Step community espouse. The message is clear to me. Patience is not optional, but a necessity. You're taking on a lifetime of work here and you can't cram it all into one week.

It's understandable that you want there to be a starting point, a mid-point, and an endpoint, but that's just not the way that this thing works. You must stay the course in good times and in bad. You must ride out the storms and remain committed to your path.

You'll be tested daily. You'll question your decision to remain abstinent, your decision to attend Recovery-based support group meetings, your decision to work with a Recovery-based mentor. And yet you'll simply be told to "*Let Go and Let God.*"

Recovery activates self-doubt. Nothing is clear but everything is black and white. The simplest thing will seem like advanced calculus. Doors that open easily for others will remain shut for you for what seems like forever. And yet you'll simply be told to "*Keep coming back. It works if you work it.*"

You'll feel like a laboratory mouse that's trapped in a maze. For everything about Recovery seems to be a puzzle.

zle wrapped in a conundrum wrapped in a mystery. Surrender? Faith? Humility? Man, there are people who can talk a blue streak about what each of those things are but when it comes to somebody telling you how to do them, all you'll get is a knowing grin, a pat on the shoulder and a vague promise about *"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path."*

You'll feel like the most ungrateful bastard alive, because nothing, I mean nothing, will seem like it's getting better. Who are these creatures that claim to be grateful alcoholics? Who are these people who claim to have found serenity? Who are these beings that claim to have found God. You've never been so afraid in your life. It's all new. It's all a blur to you. It's all bass backwards. The pain you're feeling is unbearable. And yet you'll simply be told to *"Turn it over."*

You want so much and you have so little. You've changed so much and you may have so little to show for those changes. You'll feel like one day you've taken three steps forward only to take nine steps back the very next day. That's Recovery. That's the rhythm. It rocks and then it rolls. Seasickness has nothing on the dizziness and upset stomachs that Recovery can and will induce. And through it all, you'll simply be told to *"Ride it out, go with the flow, have faith, and turn it over."*

You see, that's just what the journey is. It asks much of you because you're asking much of it. But there's no such thing as free parking. And so you'll be told to keep on keeping on for *"What you resist persists."*

Draw a line in the sand. Swear you'll do anything and everything but this or that and watch what your Higher Power serves up next. Just wait and see. It's uncanny how

your Higher Power can just get in your face about anything and everything. And the ansier you get, the more you'll want to run, the more you'll want to be anywhere but what you're stuck in the middle of, and then somebody will look you right in the eye and simply say, *"It's a program of spiritual progression, not perfection."*

And through it all you'll swear that this isn't what you signed up for. No way. No how. But little by little the seeds will start to grow. All the hard work will begin to bear fruit. Friendship will find its way into your life. You'll begin to feel cared about. You'll discover the blessings embedded in caring about others. You'll hate yourself less and accept yourself more. You'll begin to know what it's like to have a truly good day. Things will start to make some sense to you. You'll begin to feel some confidence in yourself. Hope will replace despair. Chaos will become more of your past and less of your future. You'll begin to respond to life rather than react.

You can have it all. You can have what you see others have. But it requires a boatload of courage, a ton of patience, and the willingness to let your Fellowship pick you up when you fall.

Patience is difficult to practice but practice it you must. The way I help my clients practice patience is by encouraging them to develop the willingness to *detach from the outcome*. This simply means to practice Recovery without being invested in what it brings to you. Don't attach expectations about the outcome to the actions that you take. Do the next right thing because it's the next right thing to do. How can you detach from the outcome? Below are some suggestions to follow.

## Pathfinder's Checklist

### *How to detach from the outcome.*

- 1) Don't develop relationships based on what you can get out of them. Develop relationships based on what you can put into them.
- 2) Don't take actions based on what they will bring to you. Take actions based on what you have to offer.
- 3) Don't communicate with your Higher Power in order to seek what you desire. Communicate with your Higher Power in order to seek guidance in how you can celebrate your relationship with your Higher Power through the ways in which you live your life.
- 4) Don't take actions based on what's the safest path. Take actions based on what's the holiest path.
- 5) Don't take actions based on what you fear the least. Take actions based on what you must learn the most.
- 6) Don't focus on what you do not have. Focus on what you have to give to others.
- 7) Don't focus on what you desire. Focus on what you can manifest in your life by doing the next right thing.

## Pathfinder's Exercise

- 1) Write about or discuss what you have to offer to a member of your Recovery-based support group.
- 2) Write about or discuss the action steps you can take in order to give a member of your Recovery-based support group what you have to offer.

- 3) Take those action steps.
- 4) Write about or discuss what you have to offer to your Recovery-based Fellowship.
- 5) Write about or discuss the action steps that you can take in order to give your Recovery-based Fellowship what you have to offer.
- 6) Take those action steps.

You can feel better and you will feel better if you practice the simple steps that I have outlined for you. Stepping out of the shadows of self-hate, shame, and alienation can only occur if you accept that you have a disease. You didn't ask for it. You didn't volunteer for it. You didn't seek it out. But have it you do and accept it you must!

Resentments will eat you alive, if you allow them to fester. Forgiveness seems like an impossible exercise until you begin to experience the freedom that comes with letting go of your resentments towards others.

Finally, patience will enable you to harvest the richness of what Recovery has to offer you. But the funny thing about Recovery is that it unfolds on your Higher Power's timetable, not yours.