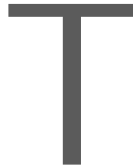


Chapter 11

**Spirituality: The Path From  
Insanity to Serenity**



*God is present in all things,  
even those events and circumstances that seem terrible.  
Within any circumstance is the seed  
that can bear the fruit of the greater good,  
if we are willing to ask God  
to lead us in bringing forth that good.*

- Mary Manin Morrissey

*By now you* can see that Recovery is a mixture of abstaining from all mood-altering substances, identifying and avoiding people, places and circumstances that threaten your abstinence, developing coping skills to apply when you feel overwhelmed by the desire to use, and learning to cope with your feelings.

But there's more to consider. Because alcoholism and drug addiction are symptoms of spiritual bankruptcy, a spiritual awakening is a cornerstone of Recovery.

Spirituality is a difficult experience for many people to give themselves to. Unfortunately, many people confuse the narrow idea of organized religion with the much broader concept of spirituality. And sadly, many people have had negative experiences with organized religion.

Spirituality is a very personal experience that exists in any form that expresses your understanding of the workings of the universe. Spirituality is often thought of as the sum total of the experiences you have in relationships that exist between you and your Self, you and the people in your life, and you and your Higher Power.

When you were active in your disease, you used alcohol and other drugs, money, sex, relationships, food, and any other external means to silence your internal pain of emptiness and meaninglessness. None of those solutions worked, for that void can only be filled by a life grounded in a relationship with your Higher Power.

People discovered long ago that it took the experience of a spiritual awakening to empower people to not only fill the void in their life they could never fill alone, but also enable them to more effectively cope with the urge to return to their consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

A spiritual awakening will occur naturally for anyone who is open to exploring the nature of their relationship with a power greater than themselves. As you fumble and stumble trying to develop a relationship with your Higher Power, you'll discover that slowly but surely resentments will lift, self-centered behavior will transform and cravings for alcohol and other drugs will be easier to manage. What you will come to understand is that these are not changes made by willpower alone, but through an active partnership with your Higher Power.

Sadly, many people avoid Recovery because they are unwilling to form a relationship with their Higher Power. They reject Recovery because they reject organized religion without making a distinction between the dogma of religion and spirituality of Recovery.

It can be very difficult to place your well-being in the hands of a Higher Power, especially if you have rejected the narrow idea of God your whole life. But the idea of a Higher Power is broader than the hierarchical, authoritarian representation of God in organized religion. Your Higher Power is just that—*your* Higher Power—taking on whatever form and shape that *you* believe your Higher Power to be.

You need not panic if you don't yet know how to think of your Higher Power. That will come with time and spiritual practice. In fact, as long as you can accept that you're not God, you're ahead of the game.

Once you accept that you're not God, once you stop insisting that your will be served, you've made a significant shift in your thinking and your approach to abstinence. For a belief in God or religion is unnecessary. What is necessary is your belief that you can't get sober

alone. It's critical that you embrace the notion that you need help to make the changes you're contemplating. Once you've accepted the fact that you can't do Recovery alone, you'll necessarily make your first leap of faith—entrusting your emotional and spiritual well-being to those you turn to for help.

Although there are no hard and fast rules to follow to become spiritual, there are certain elements of spirituality you must incorporate into your life.

## Pathfinder's Checklist



### *Elements of spirituality.*

- |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1) Faith      | 4) Humility   |
| 2) Surrender  | 5) Gratitude  |
| 3) Acceptance | 6) Meditation |

Let's first examine faith. Recovery requires your blind trust. You're asked to invest an enormous amount of time and energy into activities that require you to believe that things will work out the way they're supposed to if you just do the next right thing.

When I think of faith and Recovery, I think of faith as the beacon of light that brightens your path when things are as dark as they can get. No matter how confused, afraid or overwhelmed you may be at any moment, faith is the energy that enables you to march forward despite your fears, your doubts, and the desire to quit.

Faith empowers you to believe in your Recovery

despite the absence of proof. Faith requires trust that everything happens in *its* own time and way rather than *your* own time and way. Faith is the balm that silences your panic when you need to trust in the plan of your Higher Power. There's no question that Recovery will test your faith more times than you care to imagine.

Another element of a spiritual practice is surrender. In the context of Recovery, surrender begins with acknowledging that you are powerless over alcohol and other drugs.

An important hurdle for most people who wrestle with surrender is that they equate surrender with failure. In other words, some people think that admitting powerlessness over alcohol and other drugs is an admission of their personal inadequacy. Because people see being in control of one's behavior and emotions as a sign of strength and character, to admit that they have lost control over alcohol and other drugs is to admit that they're weak and lacking in character.

But surrender is not an admission of one's moral depravity or character flaw. Surrender is an acknowledgment that people, places, substances, and situations exist in your world that you're unable to control or influence. Once you admit that you can't control all people, places, substances, and situations, the next act of surrender becomes much easier.

The next act of surrender is admitting that a power greater than yourself exists and that you intend to turn your will over to that power. By turning things over to a power greater than yourself, you will live your life much more effortlessly and happily. Why? Because you're able to direct your focus to those aspects of your life you can

control and entrust the things you can't control to a power greater than yourself.

The next element of your spiritual practice is acceptance. Recovery is a program to help create serenity in your life where once there was only fear, chaos, and resentment. In order to transform your fear and resentment into serenity, there's much about your life and the people in it that you must accept.

In general, you must learn to accept life on its terms. Self-centered choices, attempts to control others and willfulness are ways that you attempted to avoid accepting life on its terms. At the core of your unwillingness to accept life on its own terms is fear—fear of not getting what you want, fear of trusting the ways of something or someone other than your will, fear of relying on a power greater than yourself.

You must accept that you live in a world that is fine just the way it is. To do so means you must learn to accept the differences that exist between you and others. To accept the differences between you and others means that you must give up making everyone else out to be wrong because their values and choices are different than yours.

In addition to all this, you must learn to accept *yourself*. Addiction, shame and self-loathing have twisted and distorted your sense of who you are. You've become estranged from your authentic Self. By accepting who you really are you can stop living your life based on the ideas you have about who you should be.

Lastly, you need to accept your powerlessness over your consumption of alcohol and other drugs and the choices you made while active in your disease. Only by accepting your choices can you make amends for them.

By making amends, you can begin forgiving yourself for having your disease and the choices you made as a result.

Humility is yet another element of a spiritual practice. Humility is a state of being that is disassociated from shame and grandiosity. To be humble is to accept your humanness—that you're neither the greatest nor the worst; you're merely ordinary. To be humble is to be free from the false pride of Ego.

Gratitude is another element of spiritual practice. Self-pity, dissatisfaction with what you have, and the desire to be what you're not are symptoms of the emotional and spiritual *dis-ease* that is the root cause of addiction. Wanting what you want when you want it has fueled your impulsiveness for years. Unhappy for what your life is and unwilling to accept the ways of the universe, the false pride of your Ego creates an emotional state of entitlement.

But Recovery is a spiritual journey in which you learn to experience the joys of what life has provided for you no matter the package the universe's gifts are wrapped in. Feeling gratitude for the offerings of your Higher Power enables you not to dwell on what your Ego wants or convinces you that you're entitled to. Being able to let go of your sense of entitlement and find the gift in whatever life serves up will enable you to experience joy for what your life is, gratitude for what your Higher Power has provided for you, and detachment from the demands created by your Ego seeking to be satisfied.

The last element of a spiritual practice that I want to discuss with you is meditation. Meditation can simply mean quiet time, a moment to reflect on your day, an opportunity to assess where you're at in your Recovery. Meditation is a time to reflect on the obstacles you're

encountering and seek ways to apply Recovery strategies to those obstacles. Meditation can be a moment in the day when you offer good wishes for friend and foe alike. Lastly, you can think of meditation as the time(s) of day when you try to silence the noise of your life long enough to tune in and hear what your Higher Power is saying.

## Pathfinder's Checklist



*Ways to apply your spiritual practice throughout the week.*

- 1) If you find yourself judging someone, think of a reason to feel grateful for having them in your life.
- 2) If you're feeling sorry for yourself, do something nice for somebody else.
- 3) If you find yourself isolating, call a friend or family member.
- 4) If you're feeling confused and overwhelmed, take time out to listen for the guidance of your Higher Power.
- 5) If you find you're locked in a battle with your willfulness, recite the Serenity Prayer.
- 6) If you find yourself harboring resentment towards someone, offer a prayer of well-being for them.