

POWERLESSNESS ... “THE ESSENTIALS” ... RELATIONSHIPS ... FELLOWSHIPS
A “BIG BOOK” STUDY OF FOUR “THREADS OF RECOVERY”

October 11 through December 27, 2021

(Page cites from Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, except as noted)

POWERLESSNESS - Part 1. The “classification of alcoholics”—The Doctor’s Opinion.

“The classification of alcoholics seems most difficult, and in much detail is outside the scope of this book.” (p. xxx)

Dr. Silkworth was one of the most knowledgeable people of the time regarding the illness of alcoholism, alcoholics and the treatment of alcoholism. Yet even he admits to a limitation, that “we realize we know only a little”. This humble doctor sets a good example for us as we examine what we know, and don’t know, about the illness of alcoholism.

To begin with, what does it mean in Step One when we say, “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable”? (p. 59)

When I say, “My name is Bill; I’m an alcoholic”, I am admitting some truth about me:

I am admitting I have an illness—not a character defect;

I am admitting a limitation—not a punishment;

I am admitting an opportunity—not a weakness;

I am admitting an asset—not a liability.

I once felt shame, remorse, anger, fear, and self-pity when I admitted I was an alcoholic.

What happened? How have I become positive about being powerless over alcohol?

The change in my ideas, attitudes and feelings about being powerless over alcohol began with these words in “The Doctor’s Opinion”: “Men and women drink_essentially because they like the effect produced_by alcohol.” (p. xxviii)

This was the first “new idea” I was given by AA. I really liked the “effect” of the first few drinks! I was willing to pay the price—the “effect” of my “unmanageable” life that came with all the subsequent drinks—just to recapture the feeling of those first few drinks. I chased that “sense of ease and comfort” over and over and over again, for twenty-one years!

I began to let go of several old ideas about myself regarding power and control. I admitted, slowly, that I was powerless_over alcohol. I came to believe another fact about my being powerless over alcohol—“... the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class ... these allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all ...” (p. xxviii)

As I listened in meetings, listened to my sponsor and read in our book, I came to understand the very real physical component of the illness of alcoholism:

“... the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind.” (p. xxvi)

“... drinking to overcome a [physical] craving beyond their mental control.” (p. xxx)

“... they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving.” (p. xxx)

First, I had to **admit** I have an allergy to alcohol—I am physically powerless over alcohol. Then, I must **accept** my physical powerlessness over alcohol. I cannot safely take even one drink. Powerlessness is not a character defect—denial, defiance and doubt of powerlessness are character defects! (Alcoholics Anonymous, Chapters Two, Three and Four)

Alcoholics Anonymous guides us to first **admit**, then **accept** and finally **welcome** our powerlessness over alcohol, beginning with our physical allergy. We will become open to admit, accept and welcome our powerlessness over many other people and circumstances, as well. *We will begin to see that limitations are opportunities and assets, leading to self-liberation.*

We begin our three-part review of powerlessness with “The Doctor’s Opinion”.

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"The classification of alcoholics seems most difficult, and in much detail is outside the scope of this book." (p. xxx)

"There are, of course, the psychopaths who are emotionally unstable. We are all familiar with this type. They are always 'going on the wagon for keeps'." (p. xxx)

The term "psychopath" was coined by the German psychiatrist J.L.A. Koch in 1888. It literally means "suffering soul". Today, we use the term to describe a general state of mental disorder, not a specific diagnosis. For an alcoholic, diagnosis of other possible personality disorders is practically impossible until powerlessness over alcohol is admitted and treated.

"There is the type of man who is unwilling to admit that he cannot take a drink. He plans various ways of drinking. He changes his brand or his environment." (p. xxx)

Here is the first mention in the book of the alcoholic denial, defiance and doubt of powerlessness—which leads to all manner of attempts to control our drinking. We will examine denial, defiance and doubt of powerlessness over alcohol in Part 2, "More about Alcoholism".

"There is the type who always believes that after being entirely free from alcohol for a period of time he can take a drink without danger." (p. xxx)

Here is another aspect of the denial, defiance and doubt of powerlessness over alcohol—the illusion that a long period of not drinking somehow enables the ability to drink without creating "unmanageability" problems. We will examine this in Part 2, "More about Alcoholism".

"There is the manic-depressive type, who is, perhaps, the least understood ..." (p. xxx)

Here we are, eighty-plus years after these words were written, and most of us still don't really understand manic-depression—especially those who have it! As with the psychopath, any successful diagnosis of other mental and emotional conditions with an alcoholic must first begin with the admission of powerlessness over alcohol and physical sobriety.

"Then there are types entirely normal in every respect except in the effect alcohol has upon them. They are often able, intelligent, friendly people." (p. xxx)

Yes, don't most of us want to see ourselves as this type?!!!

"All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving."

Notwithstanding other mental and emotional issues I may have, my sobriety and recovery begins with my admitting my physical powerlessness over alcohol—each day.

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I asked this question to some friends the other day—"What is the most difficult feature for you of "admitting powerlessness"? Here are some of their responses:

"Relinquishing control."

"Knowing I'm not in control."

"I'm my own god—I just need a little more time to figure it out."

"I need God's help and direction. That's hard."

"The ego-crushing reality of my lack of omnipotence."

"Failure, which means I'm worthless, so no one will help or love me. I die alone."

"Self-realization."

"Recognizing human frailty; opening the door to God's help."

"The point of my awareness—all in with big things, daily swing of things not so much."

"We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into assets." (p. 124)

Next Time: POWERLESSNESS - Part 2. "Desperate experiment of the first drink". Chp. 3.