Step One

- 1.) Admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.

(For a long time I translated or internalized this sentence as saying, "Admitted I was powerless over alcohol, and WHEN I'M DRINKING my life is unmanageable." But that's NOT what it says. When a dash is used in a sentence like this, what it's saying is: "Admitted we were powerless over alcohol, and admitted that our lives had become unmanageable." What does our literature say about this admission of powerlessness and unmanageability? In other words, what differentiates an alcoholic physically, mentally, and spiritually, from a non-alcoholic?

Physically, the alcoholic has an allergy, or an abnormal reaction, to alcohol. The alcoholic's abnormal reaction to alcohol is a craving for more alcohol once we take a few drinks. This craving NEVER happens to a non-alcoholic. Because of this, a non-alcoholic can ALWAYS predict how much they are going to drink, but an alcoholic CANNOT. Besides the craving, alcohol DOES something for an alcoholic that it does NOT do for a non-alcoholic. When an alcoholic drinks, they get a feeling of ease and comfort; an "IN control, get up and go into town, I like this" kind of a feeling. When a NON-alcoholic drinks, they get an "OUT of control, beginning of a nauseating, slightly tipsy, I don't like this so I don't want any more" kind of a feeling. That's why they stop after one or two, and make statements like, "I don't want another drink because I am FEELING that first one." Spiritually, because of the selfish and self-centered way the alcoholic views and deals with other people, their emotions, and life; they are filled with inner turmoil, discomfort, and anxiety. Since alcohol is the ONLY thing that the alcoholic has experienced that brings relief from this inner unmanageability, we turn to alcohol again and again, even though it has caused problems for us in the past. We don't see what alcohol is doing TO us, we ONLY think about what it is going to do FOR us, which describes the alcoholic's mental obsession. A NON-alcoholic's relationship with alcohol is a "take it or leave it" kind of relationship, but an ALCOHOLIC'S relationship with alcohol is an "I need it to deal with life" kind of relationship. Please ask yourself if you can relate to the experience of an alcoholic. Also, in the middle of the first paragraph on page 44, the Big Book makes a few statements that can be used to review the information about Step One and the direction we need to move in. In the middle of the first paragraph on page 44, it says: "If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely" [which describes the mental and spiritual part of alcoholism], "or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take" [which describes the physical part of alcoholism], "you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which ONLY a spiritual experience will conquer." If I'm powerless over whether I drink or not, than what I need is the Power with a capital "P"; and if my life is unmanageable, especially my INNER life [WHETHER I'M DRINKING OR NOT] than what I need is a new Manager with a capital "M". In the Fourth Edition Big Book, this Step is described on Roman numeral pages 25 - 32 (xxv - xxxii), on pages 1 - 44:1, and 52:2.)