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The Journey Continues

by: Patrick O'Neil

A BEGINNERS MIND: MEDITATION IN SOBRIETY

I remember sitting in my first AA meeting in a church basement, all fidgety and nervous, staring at a poster of the 12 Steps hanging on the wall. Horrified that in almost every step there was the word GOD, written in huge letters. I just knew this AA thing was some sort of religious cult and I was two seconds away from running out the door. When I read Step 11: "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out," I came to the conclusion I was definitely in the wrong program. Prayer and meditation, God, His will, really? I wasn't some monk or wannabe shaman burning sage and chanting "Om." I wanted to stop using drugs, not join an ashram.

I was addicted to heroin, my life was a total mess, and it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out why. I'd been ignoring the consequences of my using for a very long time: my health was on the decline, my family had practically given up on me, I'd been arrested numerous times, all my relationships were bad and centered around drugs. I was depressed and totally defeated. Yet, every time I tried to quit I'd get a few days clean, and then go right back to using. I'd been to rehab three times. I had gone to therapy and lied about being a junkie. I tried methadone and buprenorphine. I'd even moved across the country. Not surprisingly none of that had worked and now I was in an AA meeting, asking for help, and resisting what was being suggested.

Thankfully I was desperate enough that I stayed, eventually found a sponsor, and worked the steps. Although it still took me a year to make it through the first ten and then I hit step eleven, "prayer and meditation," and I totally balked. Prayer I got. I had engaged in a lot of "negotiation" prayers; "I swear god, if you get me out of this mess I'll get sober and be a good person"—that of course I never followed through on. But this meditation stuff was baffling. Truth be told I had no desire to meditate and from the very start it was hard. I have a "busy" mind. There's a ton of chatter, most of it negative, and to find a calm inner peace amongst all that noise is fairly difficult. But hey, Step 11 says meditate and by this time I definitely wanted to stay sober, so yeah—then I'm going to meditate.

From everything I had heard and read meditation was all about being present. Unfortunately, I had spent the last 20 years of life trying not to be present by doing copious amounts of drugs and alcohol. So this concept was very foreign to me, and I had to admit awkward and uncomfortable. But as the Zen philosopher and author Alan Watts said, "The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance," and that's exactly what I wanted to do. I just didn't know how.

A friend told me about a beginner's 11th Step meditation meeting. It was held at a community Zen Center and there were about twenty people sitting on floor in front of the mediation teacher, who was also a recovering addict. I sat down in the back row and looked around at my fellow meditators. They all seemed happy and it felt just as uncomfortably awkward as AA had in the beginning—maybe even worse—but I decided to hold off judging everyone and let myself experience what this meeting had to offer.

"Welcome," the teacher said, as he looked around the room making eye contact with each person. "Shoshin or beginner's mind is a term used in Buddhism that means having an attitude of openness, an eagerness to experience, and without any preconceived ideas, or being in fear. Zen monks with a lot of experience, who have studied at advanced levels, use this technique to gain new knowledge on subjects they already know. So here you all are, beginners, and already you have this advantage." Everyone laughed; he had put the entire room at ease, including me.

For the next fifteen minutes he gave a "dharma" talk about how our desires caused us suffering, and that it was time to let go of all our external issues, and instead concentrate on ourselves as we pertain to the world around us.

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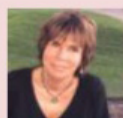
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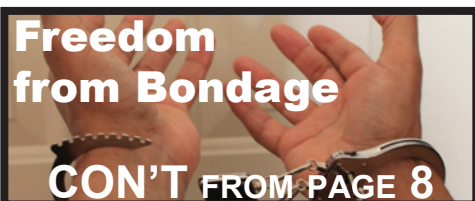
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I made a commitment then and there that I would stop drinking. I had “quit” several times before, but each time I had returned to the bottle. However, I could tell that something was different this time. In part, I had hit bottom and was sick and tired of it. I knew that if I did not quit drinking, and take care of the underlying conditions that were a direct result of my sexual abuse, I would probably lose my wife and children. This wasn’t like previous times when I had hurt Cathy, and she had forgiven me. By now, Cathy had had enough of my abusive behavior, and was insisting that something had to change, and change quickly. I had to change but didn’t know how to.

The following week I saw my therapist and she suggested that I start going to A.A. meetings, which I kindly declined to do. After all I wasn’t living under a bridge, I hadn’t lost my family, home, or business. I just had a small drinking problem. Once again, I had quit drinking, and once again my behavior had begun to get worse. My therapist patiently worked with me over the next three weeks, each week encouraging me to start attending A.A. meetings, and each week I would insist I didn’t need that kind of help. After a month of no drinking and drugging, after a month of my behavior crashing, my therapist recommended that maybe I should look into going to the Betty Ford Center. For some reason I decided that it was time to listen to my therapist, after all she had always had my best interest at heart.

My sobriety date is Feb. 5, 2006, Superbowl Sunday. I quit drinking that day but that is all I had done. I began my recovery journey in March of 2006 when I entered The Betty Ford Center. I attended the Intensive Outpatient Program for eight-weeks, started attending A.A. meetings on a regular basis, got a sponsor, and continued seeing my therapist. For me it was the combination of all three of these modalities that slowly helped me uncover and discover my character defects, replacing them with the attributes of a healthy father, husband, and contributing member of society. Today I continue seeing my therapist when needed. I work with others on a constant basis. I have become a pastor and oversee the Celebrate Recovery and Freedom Ministries at Destiny Church. Most important of all, I stay close and pray daily to God asking for His guidance, wisdom, and His will to be done in my life.

*Pastor Randy Boyd is a licensed California Alcohol & Drug Counselor (CADC-1), AA in psychology and Drug & Alcohol Studies. He is founder of the Courageous Healers Foundation – Helping Men and Their Families Heal from the Scars of Sexual Abuse. Randy is a certified Trauma Informed Transformational Life Coach. As a courageous thriving survivor of sexual abuse, Randy speaks candidly at conferences, schools and treatment facilities and is a past associate and regular featured speaker at “The It Happens to Boys Conferences” from 2008 - 2018. He also speaks to clergy, law enforcement, attorneys, doctors and teachers about the effects of abuse on men and on healing. Randy is the author of the #1 International Best Seller in 8 countries and 5 mental health categories addressing emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse titled **Healing the Wounded Child Within** – A guide to healing from the pain of abuse. He is also the author of a devotional, **30-Day Devotional to Wholeness**. Randy’s books are available at www.Amazon. You can reach Rand at www.Courageoushealers.org, www.Changeyourlifetorynow.com, Email: courageoushealers@gmail.com or call (760) 702-5498.*



In life we all make mistakes and with patience we learn that it is not the end of the world, rather it’s the beginning of a new way of being. Acceptance of who we are and our differences. Fred said, “Knowing that we can be loved exactly as we are, gives us all the best opportunity for growing into the healthiest of people.” We all have different gifts, so we all have different ways of telling the world who we are.

9. Forgiveness is the key to acceptance. “Forgiveness is a strange thing. It can sometimes be easier to forgive our enemies than our friends. It can be hardest of all to forgive people we love. Like all of life’s important coping skills, the ability to forgive and the capacity to let go of resentments most likely take root very early in our lives.” In 12 step work, during the 4th step, we learn to make amends to those we have harmed. Most importantly, we learn through therapy and 12 step work to forgive ourselves.

10. Our Imagination is limitless – like Napoleon O Hill, Fred believed that “anything the mind can believe it can achieve.” Once we are able to work through whatever our past is and who we are, or are not the possibilities of who we are, are endless. That is in essence of existence.

11. The Value of Human Connection - “Love isn’t a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now.”

12. Lastly, Fred knew there was “no life that was entirely free of pain.” He invited all of us to close our eyes and think for a few minutes of all the people who have been important to us and taught us things. In doing so we learn to practice acceptance and forgiveness, to think outside the box and thank our alcoholic father or mother, or someone that was not nice and those that were most gracious, because for Fred there ultimately was goodness in all of us. “There are three ways to ultimate success: The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind.”

Dr. Louise Stanger founded All About Interventions because she is passionate about helping families whose loved ones experience substance abuse, mental health, process addictions and chronic pain. She is committed to showing up for her clients and facilitating lasting change. She speaks about these topics all around the country, trains staff at many treatment centers, and develops original family programs. Louise has been the recipient of many awards. Dr. Louise may be reached at www.allaboutinterventions.com or (619) 507-1699. Louise co-writes her articles with Roger Porter. Roger graduated with two degrees from the University of Texas at Austin. He works in the entertainment industry and writes for film and television.



One of the questions that we brought into the space was, “What if God designed marriage to become Holy rather than to become happy?” This is a powerful question that invites us to look at how we relate to partnership and/or union. During the completion ceremony of this night our clients had multiple couples within their community, come up and share words of wisdom with them (and all of us!) as to how to create a loving and long-lasting marriage. It was such a blessing to hear from couples who had been married anywhere from 2 to 50 years.

Everything about this experience was a blessing and it was unbelievably powerful, because it was all intentional. We completed the second half of the trip with the “Values of Integrity”, “Respect”, “Trust” and “History”. At our final ceremony everyone was invited to continue this practice in their daily lives, and to live life ON PURPOSE, WITH PURPOSE. We are inviting you to do the same. This coming year may we all live with a daily practice that allows us to set clear intentions on a regular basis. It is important to ask ourselves these questions: 1) What really matters to me and why? (Get clear on values, define them and connect to why they are important to you) 2) Who am I committed to being? (to myself, my family, my community, the world at large) 3) What am I committed to creating? (Get specific in multiple areas; Health, Relationships, Money, Spirituality/Personal Growth, Family, Romance, Physical Environment). Once you have clarity you can create annual, monthly, weekly and daily intentions that will support you in fulfilling the bigger vision. Rome wasn’t built in a day. The greatest things we create in life are built one action at a time and with clear intention. May you be blessed in this practice, and on your journey. We would love to hear your visions and intentions, so please email us with what you are creating! *Love only, Rudy and Kelly Castro, Conscious Partnership*

www.kellyandrudy.com, Rudy is a therapist, and Kelly is a Certified Relationship Coach. They are founders of Conscious Partnership Coaching and provide a healing environment for any kind of partnership. Together they have created a beautiful family and a business designed for service. Whether you are an individual looking to create any powerful partnership in your life whether it is business/family/friend, or a couple looking to develop deeper levels of intimacy, they are here to help guide you. Rudy & Kelly’s email: consciouspartnershipcoaching@gmail.com



I had suffered under addiction for many years. I was more than ready and willing to stop.

The first 10 minutes of that 20 minute meditation was the longest 10 minutes of my life. I kept worrying that I was doing it wrong. I initially closed my eyes only to open them and see everyone else seemingly entranced. I wasn’t sure what to do, so I did nothing, and for the second time in my recovery I didn’t run away. I finally got comfortable with my sitting position, adjusting my body, keeping my back straight. I cleared my mind of my preconceived judgments and stopped worrying about every little detail, and people around me. I let go of everything external that I was so concerned with prior to walking into that room. And when I came at meditation with this “beginner’s mind”, I experienced an overwhelming feeling of peacefulness and my internal dialogue calmed down to a dull murmur in background.

Over the next five years I kept attending that meeting and even began meditating at home. Eventually my breath fell into its natural rhythm and my thoughts became less intrusive. In a world that is moving so fast with so much input that at times it can be so overwhelming, the meditation practice that I started then, has helped me find an inner peace I never thought I was capable of obtaining.

*Patrick O’Neil is a former junkie bank robber and the author of the memoirs *Gun, Needle, Spoon*, and the forthcoming, *Anarchy At The Circle K.* For the past 19 years he has lived and worked in the recovery community as a recovering addict/alcoholic, a drug and alcohol counselor, a college instructor, and he is currently a group facilitator at Cast Centers in West Hollywood. In 2015 the State of California granted him a Certificate of Rehabilitation. In 2016 California Governor Edmund G. Brown awarded him a Governor’s Pardon. He has taught writing workshops in numerous correctional facilities and institutions and continues to be of service to his fellowship and community. For more information, please visit: www.patrick-oneil.com.*