

## Expectations...as outlined in the Big Book

1. Page 420: Perhaps the best thing of all for me is to remember that my serenity is inversely proportional to my expectations. The higher my expectations of Max and other people are, the lower is my serenity. I can watch my serenity level rise when I discard my expectations. But then my “rights” try to move in, and they too can force my serenity level down. I have to discard my “rights,” as well as my expectations, by asking myself, How important is it, really? How important is it compared to my serenity, my emotional sobriety? And when I place more value on my serenity and sobriety than on anything else, I can maintain them at a higher level—at least for the time being. Acceptance is the key to my relationship with God today. I never just sit and do nothing while waiting for Him to tell me what to do. Rather, I do whatever is in front of me to be done, and I leave the results up to Him; however it turns out, that’s God’s will for me. I must keep my magic magnifying mind on my acceptance and off my expectations, for my serenity is directly proportional to my level of acceptance. When I remember this, I can see I’ve never had it so good. Thank God for A.A.!
2. Page 556: Above all, I was suffering inner pain because my performance and my accomplishments in life failed to live up to my own expectations of myself. I had to anesthetize that pain with alcohol. Of course, the more I drank, the more unrealistic my expectations became and the poorer my performance, and the gap widened. So the need to drink grew still greater

## Expectations...as outlined in The Twelve and Twelve

Tradition Six “An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”

3. Page 156: Yes, we of A.A. did dream those dreams. How natural that was, since most alcoholics are bankrupt idealists. Nearly every one of us had wished to do great good, perform great deeds, and embody great ideals. We are all perfectionists who, failing perfection, have gone to the other extreme and settled for the bottle and the blackout. Providence, through A.A., had brought us within reach of our highest expectations. So why shouldn't we share our way of life with everyone?

## Expectations...as outlined in the pamphlet AA for the woman

4. Page 19: I can now learn and grow with the people placed in my life, without putting unrealistic expectations on them or myself. I’ve gone back to my childhood church with an adult faith, and I’m active in A.A. service as well as other community and professional affairs.

# AA GRAPEVINE

From the February 1987 magazine.

## **Emotional Pain**

Shortly after I came into the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous in November 1984, I remarked to my sponsor that I had no memory of ever before experiencing the feeling that a knife was being slowly twisted in my gut. But I've since learned a lot about what causes most of the emotional pain I experience.

I never experienced that painful feeling inside of me prior to AA because I never honestly faced any painful situation in my life. My pattern had been to smooth over any bad situation with such thoughts as "Things aren't really that bad," or "He didn't mean that the way it sounded," or "She's only kidding."

My last drunk actually began in my mind as a "suicide mission." I made a decision to drink so that I might gain the alcohol-induced courage I needed to kill myself. I had made several serious suicide attempts in past years, but there was a difference between those previous attempts and the one I mused over in late October 1984; for even as I planned my death, everything in me was screaming that I really did not want to die. I wanted to live. I had never known that before. That was the difference.

I believe that the overwhelming sadness I felt at that time was caused in part by my deep desire to live. The desire to live had been implanted in me only a few short months before, when I'd been introduced to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Shortly after that introduction to AA, my enthusiasm began to fade rapidly as the pain of reality started closing in on me from every direction.

One July evening in 1984, I sat before my typewriter and pecked out the following: "I can't seem to find the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, and I guess I don't have the courage to change the things I can. However, I do have the wisdom to know that!"

I took a big swig of beer, read what I'd typed and thought, "That sounds pretty good!" I smiled, took another sip of beer, then brushed the tears from my eyes.

I didn't realize it then, but I'd made a lot of headway toward learning how to live a life of sobriety when I typed those words; because I had never known those things before. I had never accepted anything that I didn't like, and my way of changing things was to "back off" before I got hurt, or to flat-out deny that the possibility of my getting hurt even existed. My Higher Power, working in one of his mysterious ways, had given me the wisdom to recognize those two important facts about myself.

Since I could not accept things, and since I could not change things, I then proceeded with my alternate plan. However, my "suicide mission" was aborted by the divine intervention of my Higher Power, who sent my therapist, counselors, policemen, judges, and other such "angels of necessity" into my life to assist me during that dark period.

I was transported to a hospital and admitted to the psychiatric intensive care unit. Drunk as I was when I entered that ward, I knew before the heavy doors ever closed behind me that I would not be able to bear the pain that awaited me in that confined area.

When I was transferred to an open ward two days later, I not only left the hospital, I left town! I'd take no more chances on being locked up with my pain ever again! I had reached a position in my life where no human power could relieve me of the insanity of my alcoholism.

Feeling desperate and trapped, I ran away from a place offered me comfort in past years. Now I know why I found no comfort there in October 1984; because those heavy doors had never before kept me locked in. Rather, they kept a cruel, cruel world locked out. Even in my confusion, I sensed the difference.

My understanding of emotional today is that it is caused by unfulfilled expectations. Not the expectations I think others may have of me, but the expectations I have of myself and others.

Another person's expectations of me will not cause me to experience emotional pain. I will not hurt because I am unable to someone else's expectations of me; I will hurt if I am unable to meet my own expectations of myself in my efforts to please others. If others don't act or react the way I would like them to, I can't blame them. I have to look at me. What had I been expecting?

Unfulfilled expectations are only shattered dreams, and what are dreams but images of realities? Images in our minds of how we would like our realities to be or to become. We encounter problems when the images in our own minds do not coincide with the images in the minds of those we are close to, or those to whom we would like to be close. Their images usually do not agree with our own, and in many instances do not even include us.

Early in my sobriety, when I the heart-wrenching decision to "let go" of people I'd convinced myself I loved, I was surprised to discover that I was the only one holding on! The people I'd been clinging to were already gone; some of them had never been there to begin with! I am convinced that the emotional battles we fight come not in "letting go," but in "giving up."

The emotional pain I experienced in 1984 was caused by my own unfulfilled expectations of other people, places, and things. Most of any emotional pain I experience in the future will be for the same reason. Somebody or something will not be as I would like them or it to be. Another one of my "shows" will not come off as I will be expecting it to.

I truly find peace of mind only when I give up my expectations, when I let go of all my old ideas absolutely. I still have to experience the pain of the grieving cycle when I have no choice but to watch helplessly as some of my most treasured images begin to dissipate, but I don't stay "in mourning" as long as I used to.

If I can only figure out how to avoid replacing old expectations with new ones, I will someday be totally free of having to experience the kind of emotional turmoil I now go through just trying to decide if I'm ready to give something up I never even had in the first place! Until that day comes, though, I guess I'll just keep trudging toward perfection.

-- C. H.

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