

November 2012

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# Michigan City

## Daily Reprieve



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## Gratitude: a free Tool for a Magnificent life all the time

November brings Fall winds, exquisite colors, family and a heightened focus on gratitude. I love the increase in gratitude meetings this month for gratitude is an integral part of my spiritual practice...but it wasn't always.

Gratitude was one of the words I unexplainably detested when I arrived on AA's door step. I simply didn't like the word and my first couple of years in the program hearing "I'm a grateful recovering alcoholic" was enough to make me want to be sick. I rolled my eyes instead and acted as-if I bought it for a long time. Ironically and over some time I too, have become an AA cheerleader equipped with grateful pompoms and all.

For me, the month of November (and December too) is an infusion of others' gratitude that strengthens the power of mine. And I need a super dose of gratitude this year. This year my path has been exceptionally curvy and rough complicated with a force of resistance/will/self-pity that has rocked my sober life.

For most of my life I heard the word gratitude as another verbal club of the great manipulator..anyone who wanted me to do, be, or act like someone I didn't want to be. I carried guilt for hating it and resentment towards those who used this beautiful word. To me it was a battle cry to take up arms against the threat of whoever used it. It implied "I should" feel or do something so "I didn't" do any of it. What an incredible dark and heavy meaning for a word the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines as: "the state of being grateful : thankfulness".

Going with the simple definition of gratitude being "a state of being grateful"...

My life up to AA was not a conducive environment for gratitude. Life was unfair, I had been lied to and I needed to drink to simply cope with the hardships that had been

dumped on me. It was all so unfair. There were moments when gratitude would have been welcomed but my thinking wouldn't allow the thought of saying "thank you" for anything I had worked so hard for after all "they" had done to me. It was all about ME surviving the ordeals of life. And everyone around me knew all the gory details until they too left me thus, assuring me how "right" I was. Life sucked.

But then I hit the wall drunk and hopeless. In the basements of AA I started to see gratitude as the state of being grateful. With a little real sleep, meetings, and listening to almost-sane people speak and live sober lives successfully my views began to change. And so did my life.

At some point I too was a grateful alcoholic and I could do the dance with the pompoms and feel "the love" too! But then life happened...there was loss, disappointment, people not doing as I had so carefully instructed them to do, my concept of a power-greater-than-myself challenged and redefined, clients behaving badly, financial demise, my growing child changing my script I had so lovingly spent his life writing for him...and my perfect life began to crumble.

It's been hard to not run away. It's been difficult to go to meetings and speak the truth instead of speaking of the pretty picture that was once my life. This last year has been a greater challenge not to drink than in early sobriety. I am more grateful than ever for "how it works" today for only through continued sobriety no matter what, do I see the light at the end of this dark and uncertain tunnel.

Before I did anything I had to swallow a large dose of reality, readmit my powerlessness over alcohol and not drink. You know the drill, "don't drink and go to meetings." I held on like the newcomers and went back to intensified step work with my sponsor and others. But I still felt badly and my despair was attracting even more unhappiness. I had to stop the downward spiral.

## Birthdays

Bob W.	11/13/2009	3 years
James F.	11/17/2011	1 year

I reached for the Law of Attraction to help change how awful I felt and I quickly realized that it's all about gratitude. It's all about noticing something I like or better yet love, and then saying "thank you" for it! That should be easy enough right?

Not this time. This time it wasn't easy to pull myself up by my boot straps and put on my Pollyanna face so I can say "thank you" for the picture that hangs over my fireplace...for the 100<sup>th</sup> time. I didn't want to and I was justified in my rightness to how wrong life was! But saying "thank you" for what I have and getting into a state of gratitude is the only effective tool I know to get myself out of the grips of self-pity and despair. And it works when I work it.

So how does gratitude work?

It's been my experience that when I'm saying "thank you" I'm not plotting and planning for the future/expectations and I'm not rehashing the near or distant past/resentment for gratitude resides only in the present. It's the perfect exercise in "staying in the moment," "living life on life's terms," ect. Sometimes I struggle with this simple concept for the strength of self-pity is familiar and so easily justified when life doesn't go my way...it will hold me gasping under water if I allow it.

Practicing gratitude is not the same as waking up and saying "thank you" and going to bed saying "thank you" for me. It's a practice whenever my thinking gets too busy on anything other than work or even work when I'm not working, or when I feel badly, or when I wish to feel better than I already do, or when I wish to feel a vibrant spiritual connection when the peace of a constant connection isn't exciting enough, or when I'm afraid of someone or something, or, or, or.

Back to the point...here are the steps I take to practice and practice and implement a program of gratitude that may help you in discovering your own practice. I begin with a starting point, a root-cause of gratitude...love. I believe it is pure, unadulterated love that is the essence of gratitude.

1. Find someone/something you love with no ifs-and's-or-but's. For me it is my son and my mom.
2. Think, say, or write about every little thing you love about them. I love my son's laugh, his too-big Adam's apple he complains about, his skinny legs, I LOVE my son no matter what and I always will. Be careful...you might even crack a grin noticing all the delicious little things you love.
3. Look around and notice things you "like".
4. Replace "like" with "love". It can be the color of the weeds along the road, your car and maybe the fact you HAVE a car, a cozy bed, great tasting tooth paste, living in the Midwest, the seasons, ect., ect.,
5. When I'm feeling better after an infusion of love I can notice even more things to say "thank you" for. Everything I notice...the color of my car, the texture of the tree bark, the roads that I get to bike on, the jobs and the businesses who built the roads, the money the company earned and paid the employees, the families and laughter the jobs building the roads made, ect., ect., ect.
6. And I do it all day, every day.

If I mean my "thank you's" I feel better in short order. Sometimes so many good things come along life is like a giant snow ball (the moment) that gets bigger and bigger (more magnificent and effective) rolling down an exciting hill.

When/if I take my eyes off the snow ball (the moment) the snow ball hits me, flattens me, and I'm at the bottom of the hill again cold, wet, and I have trek back up again this time, heavy with melting snow. But the point is...as long as I don't take that first drink I DO trek back up that hill and start all over again.

So now that you're thinking about your own program of gratitude, why not consider the month of national Thanksgiving a jump start to your own practice of gratitude? Embrace the gratitude meetings and contribute the experience of your own practice in them. The energy of love and gratitude is where all the good things in life originate from.

May you enjoy a warm, fulfilling, and grateful Thanksgiving and THANK YOU for helping me stay and live sober today!

Chelli M.

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The District has the following AA Conference Approved Books available for the groups to purchase at reduced rates.

The Big Book (hard cover) \$8.00

The Big Book (soft cover) \$7.00

The Twelve and Twelve (hard cover) \$7.00

The Twelve and Twelve (soft cover) \$7.00

Living Sober \$4.00, As Bill Sees It \$8.00

Daily Reflections \$8.00

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## Step Eleven

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.

The following is an excerpt from 9 Essays, Buddhism & The 12 Step Model Of Recovery.

Step Eleven entails a quantum jump from Step Three. This movement of the heart and mind is a transition from a lower to a higher level of commitment, all the while maintaining its essential identity. It is an elaboration of the initial decision made to turn our will and life over to a higher power.

In both Steps we are faced with a deliberate choice: to make “a decision” and to carry on a “conscious contact.” Steps Three and Eleven both also contain the idea of surrender: in each we endeavor to subordinate our will. These two poles of will and surrender of will are emblematic of the entirety of the Twelve Steps program. Both, though seemingly moving in contradictory directions, are essential and must exist at the same time. These are also found in Buddhist meditation. Whatever the particular style, it always contains two elements - in saskrit, samatha and vipassana – calming/concentration and insight.

It is written that when the Buddha-to-be left home in his search for truth, he first studied with two of the most famous teachers of his day. Each taught a version of calming/concentration practice, which he mastered. However, he found these to be ultimately unsatisfactory. After experiencing the bliss and serenity of the meditation state, the practitioner always returns to what he left behind-himself. As a means of complete awakening, samatha by itself is inadequate.

There must, though, be a firm base from which to proceed to insight, and this is samatha. Calming and concentration are not ends in themselves, but are indispensable for the path leading to awakening and liberation. As Bill W. writes in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions:

And let's remember that meditation is in reality intensely practical. One of its first fruits is emotional balance.

Buddhist practice is often divided into three parts: ethical conduct, meditation and wisdom. In order to practice the

sort of meditation that brings us emotional balance, it is necessary that our minds not be overburdened with guilt and remorse for our past actions. In the language of recovery, it is necessary to have cleaned up to the best of our ability the wreckage of our past. At this point, we can sit down in quiet to practice calming and concentration. (It is also true that sometimes our efforts to practice meditation can lead us to understand the necessity of these actions. We should not defer practice until we feel perfectly at ease in our lives. Most of us can't wait that long.) Our results will depend largely on our ability to cease or diminish those behaviors that cause suffering. This is how ethical conduct (and Steps Four through Ten) affects meditation.

Samatha is that half of the equation in which we surrender. We let go of our busyness and “accept the things we cannot change.” Sitting with the breath or other object of concentration, we allow the rest of our mental activity to subside, returning again and again as the mind wanders.

It is the practice of vipassana, insight-the unique contribution of Buddhism to the meditation tradition- which the Buddha identified as the way out of suffering. To quote from one of the most important and frequently studied scriptures of the canon, the Satipatthana Sutta: Monks, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of nirvana-namely the four foundations of mindfulness.

This is not the place to go into a full description of the meditation techniques outlined in this teaching. It is available in many other places. But briefly, the four foundations are mindfulness of the body, of feelings, of states of mind and of mind objects. Insight meditation consists of allowing thoughts, feelings and sensations to arise in the mind and to fall away. We do this without judging them, without trying to suppress them, without holding onto them, without embroidering them. Just watching. Just noticing. Just returning to the breath.

At first, this will seem a task that is well nigh impossible. Our minds seem chaotic and untamed. In fact, our minds are chaotic and untamed; and it is only when we try to sit with them quietly that we really begin to notice just how much so they are. We can easily become discouraged by our attempts at meditation. It doesn't help that many of us are perfectionists with unrealistic expectations of ourselves. We can perhaps find some comfort in the analogy of other disciplines: we would not expect ourselves to speak flawless French after two lessons, or to be able to understand auto mechanics merely by opening the hood of a car. Our minds are much more complicated than an automobile. And the language of practice demands at least as much from us as does French.

It is ideal to expect nothing from meditation, but very difficult to do so. As with recovery and Buddhist practice in general, we originally come to meditation because we are in pain and looking for an end to pain. To sit without expectation of achievement is something that comes further down the line. We can also be confused by the literature on Buddhism meditation which, on one hand, urges us to make effort, and on the other encourages us to let go of everything. (It may be useful to remember that both Buddhism and the Steps only ask us to let go of that which causes us suffering.) The reason that the language of Buddhism (and especially the Zen school) is sometimes paradoxical is because it accurately reflects the nature of our experience.

Eihei Dogen writes:

The Zazen [sitting meditation] I speak of is not learning meditation. It is simply the dharma gate of repose and bliss, the practice/realization of totally culminated enlightenment. It is the manifestation of ultimate reality. Traps and snares can never reach it. Once its heart is grasped, you are like the dragon when he gains the water, like the tiger when she enters the mountain.

When Dogen writes of "learning meditation" he is referring to the idea that meditation is a sort of ladder we climb rung by rung until we reach enlightenment. Rather, he says, our meditation is an expression of our innate awakening, the basic sanity we talk about in Step Two. This is why he uses "practice/realization" as a single term. To practice in this way requires the same sort of faith we encounter in Step Three—a sort of willing suspension of disbelief in the idea that we are irretrievably flawed, and that we deserve the worst that life can throw at us. How would it be if we behaved as though we believed we were Buddha? When we sit down for meditation, we enact Buddha and we need nothing more.

Meditation is actually quite simple. All we have to do is calm down and pay attention...

We pray with the body as well as with the mind and the tongue. When we bow silently before an image of the buddha, When we offer incense and flowers, light and food, when we put our hands together to greet another—all of these are a form of prayer as well. Another prayer of the body is mindful attention. Going through our day, it is easy to become anesthetized to our surroundings, doing two or three things at once, experiencing the world only as object, full of things whose value is determined solely by their use to us. Mindfulness offers each thing as itself respect and gratitude. Picking up a cup, for instance, watching the hand, the cup and the motion is not the same as reaching for a cup out of the line of sight while talking on the telephone. The former (as well as the other prayers of the body) is an act of devotion. In these silent actions we reaffirm our vow to live in the world as bodhisattvas—attentive, grateful and of service.

It is possible to continue our prayer and meditation throughout the day. We can train ourselves to do so if we wish. While standing in line at the grocery store it is possible to return to the breath. When eating or drinking, we can offer a short, silent prayer of gratitude. In Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Bill writes: If...our emotional disturbance happens to be great, we will more surely keep our balance, provided we remember, and repeat to ourselves, a particular prayer or phrase that has appealed to us in our reading or meditation. Just saying it over and over will often enable us to clear a channel choked up with anger, fear, frustration, or misunderstanding...

When we call such a practice meditation or prayer, it serves the dual function of calming the mind and body and replacing unwholesome thoughts with wholesome ones. In Buddhist terms, it re-forms and trains the mind in bodhicitta, the thought of awakening. This thought of awakening, or vow to recovery, is what guides us on our way from alcoholic insanity to the grateful acceptance as things as they are and the willingness to live for the benefit of all beings.

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## October 2012 GSR Indiana District 21 Area 22 Minutes

Facilitator Steve H.  
Note taker Dan R.  
Attendees George P., Laurie O., Dan R., James F.

Meeting opened at 7:00 pm with a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer.

Minutes from September 13, 2012 were read. The minutes were approved.

Financial report for August and September 2012 was given. There was a first time charge of 10\$ for EZ business fee. George and Laurie will check into that fee. Report was approved. Dan is still trying to get phone bill sent directly to District 21.

Newsletter is out and up on the websight.

George has volunteered to take over the literature distribution. He will take to various meetings and material will be billed at cost. George will try to get literature into the prison. He wants to update the Big Books that are there. They are the third edition.

James F. brought up a question about whether the district meeting should close with the lord's prayer.

James presented his reasons for changing the closing. The matter was discussed and a vote decided that the procedure should continue.

Next meeting is November 8, 2012 at the MC Christian Church.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:45pm with the Lord's Prayer.

