Step 12

“Here we begin to practice all of the Twelve Steps of the program in our daily lives so that we and those about us can find **emotional sobriety**.”


“Recovery is and demands change. Recovery means things have to be different than they were. It means that I have to be different than I was (p.46 - 1985) **Stage II Recovery**.”

Earnie Larsen
Jung is reported to have told his patient Rowland Hazard the following:

“Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences..... They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions and attitudes which were once the guiding forces for the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them.

Pg. 22. Alcoholics Anonymous”

“Your program cannot take you further than your definition of recovery.”

Stages of Recovery
Earnie described Stage One Recovery as breaking the hold of our primary addiction.

“Abstinence may get you out of a bad place, but getting out of a bad place just gets you out; it is not the same as getting to a good place (p.10).”

“Victims of dry drunks have made a First Step relative to their addiction, but have not made a First Step relative to the living problems that underlies all addictions and ultimately limits their ability to function in loving relationships.”

Emotional sobriety is the cure for sober suffering.
Emotional Sobriety involves becoming aware of and challenging our habitual attitudes and beliefs about:

- Our Problem
- Our Self
- Our Relationships with Others

**Stage II**

Earnie Larsen

"...Stage II Recovery gets at the underlying patterns and habits that caused us trouble in the first place. And if nothing changes, then nothing changes...the same results will pop up through our whole life (p. 83)."
Many people in recovery … “have made a First Step relative to their addiction, but have not made a First Step relative to the living problems that underlies all addictions and ultimately limits their ability to function in loving relationships.”

Fred Holmquist describes this experience as “sober suffering.”

“I believe that learning to love and make relationships work is at the core of full recovery (p. 15).”
Stage II Recovery is contingent on emotional sobriety.

Emotional Sobriety and Our Emotional Center of Gravity

The Shift in the Location of the Emotional Center of Gravity in Emotional Sobriety

I'm OK if _______?
I'm OK even if _______?
Emotional sobriety creates **true independence of spirit**.

Emotional Sobriety and Living in the Space Between the Stimulus and Response

“There’s a space between the Stimulus and our Response. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom - try to live there.”

Viktor Frankl, M.D.

The Essence of Emotional Sobriety
Emotional Sobriety Lives Here

- Autonomy
- Individuality
- Holding on to Yourself
- Soothing and Supporting Yourself
- Keeping a Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Balance
- Maintaining Your Emotional Center of Gravity
- Validating Yourself
- Having Flexibility in your Response-Ability
- Letting the Best of You Run the Show

Emotional Sobriety and Emotional Maturity

“…maturing is the transcendence from environmental support to self-support. (p.28).”

Fritz Perls, M.D. - Founder of Gestalt Therapy
“If our freedom depends exclusively on another person allowing it, we lose our own sense of the part we must exercise in protecting and defining our own psychological space…”


Emotional Sobriety and Responsibility

“Self-responsibility begins with the recognition that I am ultimately responsible for my own existence; that no one else is here on earth to serve me, to take care of me, or fill my needs.”

"So long as an individual cannot accept the fact of what he is, cannot permit himself to be fully aware of it, cannot fully admit the truth into his consciousness, he cannot move beyond that point: if he denies the reality of his condition, he cannot proceed to alter it, cannot achieve healthy changes in his personality (p. 110 - The Disowned Self)."

I am responsible for ...

- the level of consciousness or awareness I bring to my recovery, my relationship with myself and others.
- my choices, decisions, and actions.
- the fulfillment of my desires and needs.
- how I deal with people.
- what I do about my feelings and emotions.
- my life and well being.
- having the best of me talk to the best of you.
- my level of humility.
- my emotional sobriety.

Emotional Sobriety and Unenforceable Rules
“Where a person experiences a loss or trauma in childhood that undermines his sense of security and self-acceptance, he would **project** into his image of the future the **requirement** that it **reverse** the experiences of the past.”


“**Desperation creates Illusions** - **illusions create desperation.**”

Alexander Lowen, M.D.

“The critical point during the development, both collectively and individually, is the ability to differentiate between self-actualization and the actualization of a concept.”

“Many people dedicate their lives to actualize a concept of what they should be like, rather than to actualize themselves...This is again the curse of the ideal. The curse that you should not be what you are.”

“The fostering of the phony self is always at the expense of the real self, the latter being treated with disdain, at best like a poor relative.”

Karen Horney, M.D.  
Self Analysis - 1942, p. 23

“At the core of this alienation from the actual-self... is the loss of the feeling of being an active determining force in our own lives.”

Karen Horney, M.D.  
Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization

“The self-actualizer expects the possible. The one who wants to actualize a concept attempts the impossible.”

“The integrity of a person is impaired because of the alienation from the self, the unavoidable unconscious pretenses, the also unavoidable unconscious compromises due to unsolved conflicts, the self-contempt - all these forces lead to a diminished capacity for being sincere with oneself.”

Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Toward Self-Realization

“Growing in a healthy way means liberating those evolutionary constructive forces inherent in man which urge him to realize his given potentialities.”


A Definition of Emotional Sobriety

“Emotional Sobriety is when the best in you does the thinking and talking for all of you. This state of mind is achieved when what you do becomes the determining force in your emotional well being rather than allowing your emotional well being to be overly influenced by external events or by what others are or are not doing.”

Allen Berger, Ph.D. - 2018
I think many oldsters who have put our ‘booze cure’ to severe but successful tests still find they often lack emotional sobriety. Perhaps they will be the spearhead for the next major development in AA, the development of much more real maturity and balance (which is to say, humility) in our relations with ourselves, with our fellows, and with God.

Those adolescent urges that so many of us have for top approval, perfect security, and perfect romance, urges quite appropriate to age seventeen, prove to be an impossible way of life when we are at age forty-seven and fifty seven.
Since AA began, I’ve taken immense wallops in all these areas because of my failure to grow up emotionally and spiritually. My God, how painful it is to keep demanding the impossible, and how very painful to discover, finally, that all along we had the cart before the horse. Then comes the final agony of seeing how awfully wrong we have been, but still finding ourselves unable to get off the emotional merry-go-round.

How to translate a right mental conviction into a right emotional result, and so into easy, happy and good living. Well, that’s not only the neurotics problem, it’s the problem of life itself for all of us who have got to the point of real willingness to hew to right principles in all of our affairs.

Even then, as we hew away, peace and joy may still elude us. That’s the place so many AA oldsters have come to. And it’s a hell of a spot, literally. How shall our unconscious, from which so many of our fears, compulsions and phony aspirations still stream, be brought into line with what we actually believe, know and want? How to convince our dumb, raging and hidden Mr. Hyde becomes our main task.
Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier by Bill Wilson (1958)

I've recently come to believe that this can be achieved. I believe so because I begin to see many benighted ones, folks like you and me, commencing to get results.

Last autumn, depression, having no really rational cause at all, almost took me to the cleaners. I began to be scared that I was in for another long chronic spell. Considering the grief I've had with depressions, it wasn't a bright prospect.

Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier by Bill Wilson (1958)

I kept asking myself, ‘Why can't the Twelve Steps work to release depression?’ By the hour, I stared at the St. Francis Prayer … ‘it's better to comfort than to be comforted.’ Here was the formula all right, but why didn't it work?

Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier by Bill Wilson (1958)

Suddenly, I realized what the matter was. My basic flaw had always been dependence, almost absolute dependence, on people or circumstances to supply me with prestige, security, and the like. Failing to get these things according to my perfectionist dreams and specifications, I had fought for them. And when defeat came, so did my depression.
There wasn’t a chance of making the outgoing love of St. Francis a workable and joyous way of life until these fatal and almost absolute dependencies were cut away.

Because I had over the years undergone a little spiritual development, the absolute quality of these frightful dependencies had never before been so starkly revealed.

Reinforced by what grace I could secure in prayer, I found I had to exert every ounce of will and action to cut off these faulty emotional dependencies upon people, upon AA, indeed upon any act or circumstance whatsoever.

Then could I be free to love as Francis did. Emotional and instinctual satisfactions, I saw, were really the extra dividends of having love, offering love, and expressing love appropriate to each relation of life.

Plainly, I could not avail myself to God’s love until I was able to offer it back to Him by loving others as He would have me. And I couldn’t possibly do that so long as I was victimized by false dependencies.

For my dependencies meant demand, a demand for the possession and control of the people and the conditions surrounding me. While those words “absolute dependence” may look like a gimmick, they were the ones that helped to trigger my release into my present degree of stability and quietness of mind, qualities which I am now trying to consolidate by offering love to others regardless of the return to me.
Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier by Bill Wilson (1958)

This seems to be the primary healing circuit: an outgoing love of God's creation and His people, by means of which we avail ourselves of His love for us. It is most clear that the real current can't flow until our paralyzing dependencies are broken, and broken at depth. Only then can we possibly have a glimmer of what adult love really is.

Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier by Bill Wilson (1958)

If we examine every disturbance we have, great or small, we will find at the root of it some unhealthy dependence and its consequent demand. Let us, with God's help, continually surrender these hobbling demands. Then we can be set free to live and love: we may then be able to gain emotional sobriety.

Emotional Sobriety: The Next Frontier by Bill Wilson (1958)

Of course I haven't offered you a really new idea only a gimmick that has started to unhook several of my own “hexes” at depth. Nowadays, my brain no longer races compulsively in either elation, grandiosity, or depression. I have been given a quiet place in bright sunshine.”
“We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men, that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us......we needed to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life... Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.”

Viktor E. Frankl (1959), Man’s Search for Meaning.

Step 10

Finally we begin to see that all people, including ourselves, are to some extent emotional ill as well as frequently wrong and then we approach true tolerance and see what real love for our fellows actually means. It will become more and more evident as we go forward that it is pointless to become angry or to get hurt by people, who like us, are suffering from the pains of growing up.


“...sobriety is only the bare beginning. It is only the first gift of the first awakening. If more gifts are to be received, our awakening has to go on. And if it does go on, we find that bit by bit by bit we can discard the old life – the one that didn’t work – for a new life that can and does work under any conditions whatever. Regardless of worldly success or failure, regardless of pain or joy, regardless of sickness or health or even of death itself, a new life of endless possibilities can be lived if we are willing to continue our awakening.”

Bill Wilson (1957).