



*Embodied Recovery*

*Presents*



THE INSTITUTE FOR  
OPTIMAL RECOVERY &  
EMOTIONAL SOBRIETY

Helping People Grow to Full Recovery and Emotional Freedom

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## Emotional Sobriety and Recovery: Clinical Applications

Allen Berger, Ph.D.  
Clinical Director and Hazelden Author

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### Agenda for Morning Session

- An overview of the day and an expression of our gratitude for Embodied Recovery for hosting this event.
- Introductions and discussion of what you'd like from this workshop.
- My hopes for you.
- An overview of the basic concepts of emotional sobriety.

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## Session 1

### Understanding and Exploring Emotional Sobriety

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*The Problem in a Nutshell*

*Life happens and we object.*

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*The objection is based on the idea that this is not how life is **supposed** to be or it is not how someone **should** behave.*

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Fritz Perls' defined emotional maturation (emotional sobriety) as, the transcendence from "environmental support to self-support."



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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**.*



Carl Jung, M.D.



Rowland Hazard

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Emotional Sobriety involves becoming aware of and changing our habitual attitudes and beliefs (expectations or unenforceable rules) about:

1. Our Problems or Brokenness
2. Our Self-Concept
3. Our Relationship with Others
4. Life

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### A Definition of Emotional Sobriety

*"Emotional Sobriety is an appropriate balance and coordination of all that we are. It's when **the best in us does the thinking and talking for all of us**. It is when we talk the best in others.*

*Emotional sobriety is the result of a 180% shift in our attitude and perspective about life. We shift our focus from what is supposed to happen to coping with what is.*

*Emotional sobriety is attained when **what we do becomes the determining force in our emotional well being** rather than allowing our emotional well being to be overly influenced by external events or by what others are or are not doing."*

*Allen Berger, Ph.D. - 2019*

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## S Emotional Sobriety Lives Here R

- 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

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*"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.**"*



Earnie Larsen

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Fred Holmquist -  
Author of Drop the Rock: The Ripple  
Effect.

*Fred Holmquist  
describes this  
experience as  
"sober suffering."*

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Emotional sobriety  
addresses these so called  
**habits and patterns** that  
caused us trouble in the first  
place.

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Earnie described Stage  
Two Recovery as  
*"...rebuilding of the life  
that was saved in Stage  
One."*



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)."*

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Emotional sobriety  
addresses these so called  
**habits and patterns** that  
caused us trouble in the first  
place.

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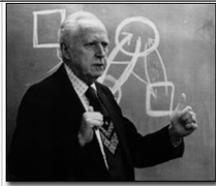
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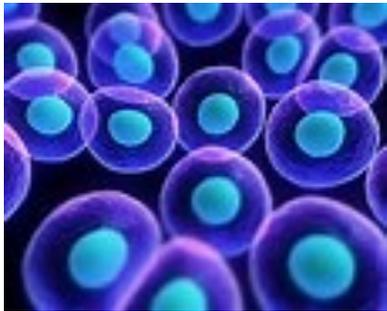
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## Differentiation and Emotional Sobriety



Dr. Murray Bowen

Dr. Murray Bowen's work on differentiation.



## Differentiation



Union

Individuality

The desire to please and cooperate.

The desire to be one's true or authentic self.

## High Differentiation

*A person with a well-differentiated "self" recognizes his realistic dependence on others, but he can stay calm and clear headed enough in the face of conflict, criticism, and rejection to distinguish thinking rooted in a careful assessment of the facts from thinking clouded by emotionality.*

The Bowen Center

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## High Differentiation

- Maintains a solid and flexible sense of self.
- Thoughtful and reflective before reacting.
- Shoulds are non-existent.
- Does not take things personally.
- I to Thou relations.

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## Low Differentiation

People with a poorly differentiated "self" depend so heavily on the acceptance and approval of others that either they quickly adjust what they think, say, and do to please others or they dogmatically proclaim what others should be like and pressure them to conform.

Those who move against people depend on approval and acceptance as much as those who move towards people. Top Dogs push others to agree with them rather than agreeing with others. Disagreement threatens someone who moves against people as much as it threatens someone who moves towards people.

The Bowen Center

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## Effects of Low Differentiation

- Creates Emotional Fusion that causes:
  - Dysregulation.
  - Takes things personally.
  - Self-esteem is other validated.
  - Has a reflected sense of self (Schnarch, 1999).
  - Poor psychological boundaries.
    - Taking responsibility for things you are not responsible for like your partner's feelings.
    - Experiencing your partner's emotional reaction as your own feelings.
  - Emotional Reactivity - Anger, Depression and Anxiety

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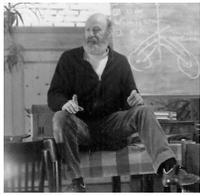
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**“Separateness is a dimension of relatedness, *not* a disruption of it.”**



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## Emotional Sobriety and Our Emotional Center of Gravity

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



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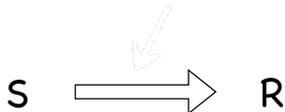
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## The Essence of Emotional Sobriety



Viktor Frankl, M.D.

*“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.”*



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*Emotional sobriety is about  
having **emotional  
freedom** and **true  
autonomy of spirit.***

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**Session 2**  
Unpacking Bill's Letter

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Bill's letter written in  
1956 to a fellow member  
of AA which was  
published in the 1958  
Grapevine

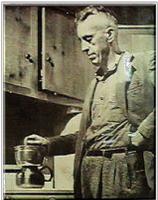
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**Emotional Sobriety: The Next  
Frontier by Bill Wilson (January -  
1958)**



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 spear head 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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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**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.

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**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?

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**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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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."

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**Emotional Sobriety and Our True Self**

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***"Desperation creates Illusions - illusions create desperation."***



Alexander Lowen, M.D.

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***"You will never find yourself in what you have built to define yourself."***



Michael A. Singer

The Untethered Soul: The Journey Beyond Yourself (p. 130)

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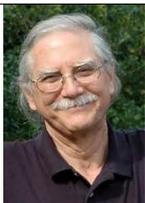
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*"Basically you attempt to create a sense of stability and steadiness inside. This generates a false, but welcomed, sense of security."*

The Untethered Soul: The Journey Beyond Yourself



Michael A. Singer

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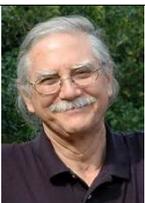
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*"If you dare to look, you will see that you have built your entire life based on the model you have built around yourself."*

The Untethered Soul: The Journey Beyond Yourself



Michael A. Singer

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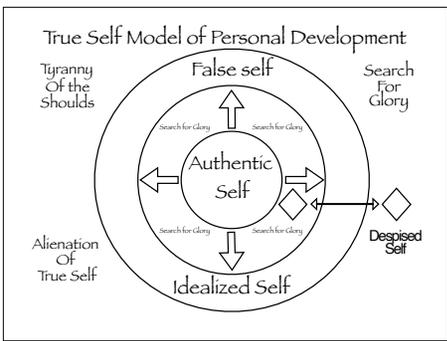
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*"Where a person experiences a loss or trauma in childhood that undermines his sense of security and self-acceptance, he would project into his image of the future the requirement that it reverse the experiences of the past."*

Lowen, A. (1975). *Bionergetics*. Penguin Book.



Alexander Lowen, M.D.

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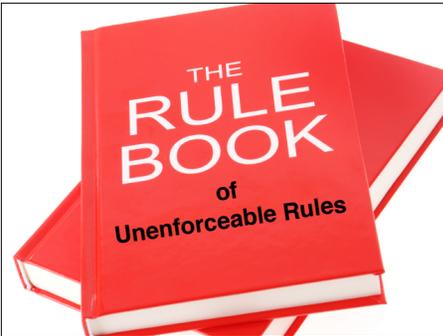
Emotional Dependency and its  
Impact on Relationships

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*“Expectations lead to the erosion of any relationship.*

*The myth that the resolution of loneliness will result because we have found an intimate one-on-one relationship is a cop out.*

*It begins a **toxic process** which **dissipates the mutual nourishment** that occurs when both people are **committed to sustaining nourishing interaction and growth of their separate selves.**”*

Dr. Jerry Greenwald (1980). *Breaking Out of Loneliness*. Simon & Shuster: NY.

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Dr. Nathaniel Branden

“If I do not feel lovable, then it is **very difficult to believe** that anyone else loves me.”

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"One of the truly basic problems is that our society bases the marital relationship almost completely on love and then imposes demands on it that love can never solely fulfill.  
If you love me you won't do anything without me.  
If you love me you'll do what I say.  
If you love me you'll give me what I want.  
If you love me you'll know what I want before I ask.  
These kinds of practices soon make love into a kind of blackmail, I call the clutch."

Virginia Satir (1972) - Peoplemaking.



Virginia Satir, Ph.D.

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"Our **dependency makes slaves out of us**, especially if this dependency is a **dependency of our self-esteem**. If you need encouragement, praise, pats on the back from everybody, then you make everybody your **judge**."



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"We are always trying to get out of our **emotional jail**.... Mostly we try by begging, threatening, or pleasing other people, **trying to get them to do it for us**."



Virginia Satir, Ph.D.

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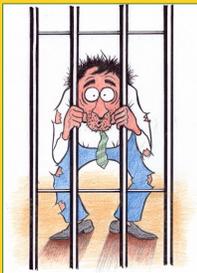
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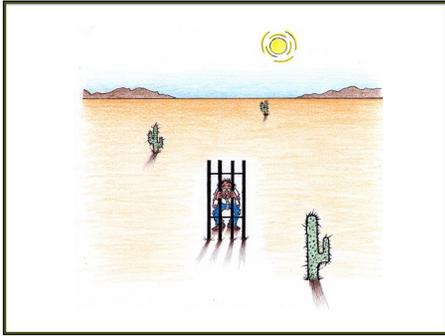
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*"It's not your job to understand me, it's mine. (p.160)."*

Byron Katie (2005). I Need Your Love - Is That True. Three River Press: NY.

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Virginia Satir, Ph.D.

*"We must not allow other people's limited perceptions to define us."*

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Eric Fromm, M.D.

Mature love is **"union with the preservation of integrity."**

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Earnie Larsen

*"I believe that **learning to make relationships work** and **learning to love** is at the **core** of full recovery (p. 15)."*

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*"It only takes one clear person to have a good relationship. (p. 104)."*

Byron Katie (2005). I Need Your Love - Is That True. Three River Press: NY.

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### How Emotional Dependency Impacts Coping with Our Addiction(s)

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*Emotional dependency **hinders** a healthy response to dealing with our addiction or any problem for that matter - we see a problem as defining ourselves as less than (we blame and shame ourselves) instead of supporting ourselves.*

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*"As long as you fight a symptom, it will become worse. If you take responsibility for what you are doing to yourself, how you produce your symptoms, how you produce your illness, how you produce your existence, you get in touch with yourself - growth begins, integration begins (p.178)."*



Fritz Perls (1969). Gestalt Therapy Verbatim.

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*Our emotional dependency demands that we control the people in our lives (the more important they are the more we need to control them) and thereby we become control freaks with a lot of unenforceable rules.*

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Dr. Nathaniel Branden

*Desired change is "...produced not by resisting awareness of the individual's immediate experience, but by the exact opposite course: by becoming open to that experience."*

Nathaniel Branden (1971, p. 119) , The Disowned Self.

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How it Impacts Our Relationships with Reality

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*Our emotional dependency makes us demand that reality conforms to our expectations.*

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*"Reality is only reality 100% of the time!"*

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## Emotional Sobriety and Responsibility

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Dr. Nathaniel Brandon

*"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."*

Nathaniel Brandon (1996) Taking Responsibility.

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***"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..."***

Erving and Miriam Polster, Ph.D.  
Gestalt Therapy Integrated: Contours  
of Theory and Practice (1973).

## How Emotional Sobriety Impacts Our Relationship with Our Self



*Emotional dependency makes us objectify ourselves - we develop a reflective sense of self (my value is contingent upon external validation and approval).*



***"Low self-esteem causes an  
"...excessive preoccupation with  
gaining the approval and avoiding  
the disapproval of others,  
hungering for validation and  
support at every turn of our  
existence."***

Nathaniel Branden (1981)

## Emotional Sobriety and the 12 Steps of AA

### Step Ten

*"In all these situations we need **self-restraint, honest analysis** of what is involved, a **willingness to admit** when the **fault** is ours, and an equal **willingness to forgive** when the fault is elsewhere. We need not be discouraged when we fall into the error of our old ways, for these disciplines are not easy. **We shall look for progress, not for perfection.**"*

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions,  
Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952 - 1981.



### Step 11

*·There is a direct linkage among self-examination, meditation, and prayer. Taken separately these practices can bring much relief and benefit. But when they are logically interwoven, the result is an **unshakeable foundation for life.**·*

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 1952 - 1981.



### Step Ten

*"...It is a spiritual axiom that every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us."*

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions,  
Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952 - 1981.



## Step Ten



*"A spot check inventory taken in the midst of such disturbance can be of very great help in **quieting stormy emotions.**"*

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions,  
Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952 - 1981.

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## Step Ten



*"The quick inventory is aimed at our daily ups and downs, especially those where people or new events **throw us off balance and tempt us to make mistakes.**"*

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions,  
Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952 - 1981.

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## A Few Tips on Holding on to Yourself

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Trouble in a relationship doesn't mean something is wrong, it means something is right. Relationships are people growers.

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A healthy relationship has room  
enough for two, instead of insisting  
on making room for unenforceable  
rules.

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A healthy relationship is when  
struggle is experienced as  
beneficial, differences as desirable,  
and grief as necessary.

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Claim your experience, don't  
let it claim you.

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Stop pressuring other people to  
change to make you feel better,  
instead pressure yourself change and  
become more grounded.

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Remember, the problem is not the problem, the problem lies in how you are coping with the troubling event or situation.

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Stop erasing yourself.

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No One is Coming

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You are the one you've been waiting for!

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When you face trouble  
add more "self" don't  
subtract "your self"  
from the conflict or  
difficulty.

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Virginia Satir, Ph.D.

"Life is not what it's  
supposed to be. **It is  
what it is.** The way you  
**cope** with it, **is what  
makes the difference.**"

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"....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 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).

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## Allen's Experience

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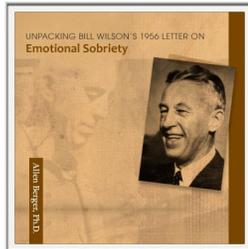
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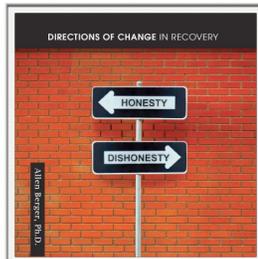
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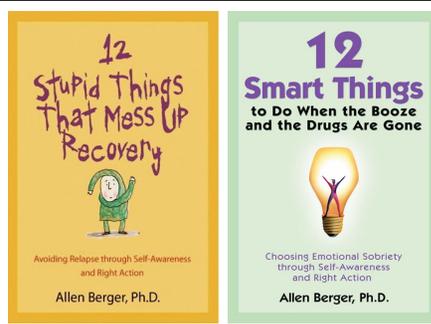
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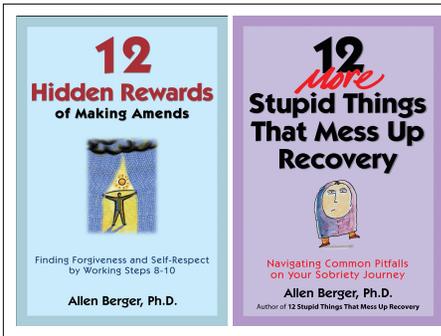
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### Contact Information

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