

Michael A.'s Step One Discussion

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

CD 1, Track 1: AA in People's Houses

Michael: Okay, hi. Thanks to everybody for coming. My sponsor told me early on when I started working with him.... It was his opinion that if we didn't get AA out of treatment centers and churches and buildings and into people's houses, people are gonna die. So that's why it's really cool to have something like this go on. He viewed people's houses as extensions of themselves. And alcoholics tend to become very isolated people, and not too open, so we've gravitated to, "Let's do AA in a church basement;" or, "Let's do AA at a treatment center;" or, "Let's do AA in a bank building....," but not in our house. But the Big Book tells us that to stop drinking is just the beginning – separation. And it says on page 19, "A much more important demonstration in our principles lies before us in our respective homes, occupations, and affairs." In that order. "Affairs" would be an AA meeting: number three on the list. And he made it very clear to me that if I can't live a spiritual life in my home, I can't live a spiritual life. If I can't live a spiritual life where I work, I can't live a spiritual life. And if I can't live a spiritual life in my dealings with the world and it's people, see, I can't live a spiritual life. He said it's all phony; he said if we're not practicing it at home, and we're just displaying it in an AA group, he said that's not real. So I had to sit there and go, "What the fuck are you talking about?" But it turned out he was right. So I'm very pleased any time I can be part of an AA group that takes place like *this* – away from what we normally call the AA organization – in somebody's house. And I'd like to thank Fred and Michelle for making their house – opening their house for all of us – possible, so that we can do what we're here to do.

CD 1, Track 2: AA Way of Life

Michael: Okay, that said, couple other things. I would like to ask each of you to make a commitment to yourself and to the other people in this room to keep your focus on the program that we're going to be talking about for the entire time that we're doing that. That means two days, see. And that includes overnight tonight. We've got some homework for you to do overnight tonight. So, I'd like you to begin to consider that the steps and the AA way of life are not something that you pick up and then set down, or use when you're in trouble, or something like that. That they are something that needs to be practiced all day, every day, no matter what you're doing. The way my sponsor put it, the world is your twelfth step call. That means our families, our friends, our homes, our jobs, when we're driving on the freeway, when we're buying gasoline, when we're in the supermarket, when we're at church – see – when we're talking to *especially* another alcoholic in Alcoholics Anonymous who needs a message of recovery. It's all based on a reliance upon a power greater than ourselves. It's very difficult to do that if we don't have a relationship with a power greater than ourselves. So, there are lots of examples. Spirituality as the big-book presents it is not some airy-fair, ooga-booga thing. And all of us, when we're new in AA, we have all these ideas

that it's airy-fairy, ooga-booga, mystical-something-er-rather. I know I did, because I was a spiritual seeker for many years – *Spiritual* – capital S. *I knew what it was all about*. Fact was, I knew nothing, zip, zero. I had this idea that if I ever found God in my life, then everything was going to be warm, pink, and fuzzy 24/7 for the rest of my life. I'd be wearing white robes sitting up on a stage somewhere saying these really *wise* things, having people nod their head going, “Wow, he's got his spiritual shit together.” And, you know, all that kind of crap. See, my view of it had nothing to do with character building; honesty; the repair of a broken life; transcending selfishness; and getting to a point where I could do something, one little thing, in my life totally unselfishly without some kind of a furtive, secret motive, hoping to get something back from somebody.

CD 1, Track 3: Prescriptive versus Prophylactic

Michael: If, let's say, Andrea has a cold today. So don't stand in front of her when she coughs. But if her cold gets worse and progresses into something we call *the flu*, for example, she'll probably end up at a doctor. And she'll describe her symptoms to the doctor: “I'm coughing, and I ache, and my stomach hurts and,” you know, “I got a headache, and,” whatever it is. And he's gonna say, “Oh, okay, you have the flu.” And he's gonna get out his little *surrender pad*, and he's going to write what we call a *prescription* on it. He's gonna give her the prescription. She goes to the pharmacy, gets the medicine, takes the medicine. Did he just treat her flu?

Two people: No.

Michael: No. What did he treat?

Several people: Her symptoms.

Michael: The symptoms of the flu. See, that's called *prescriptive medicine*. That's what happens in AA. We think that the steps are prescriptive for the crap that's going on in our lives, so we can sail along and live this essentially selfish life and then when the shit hits the fan, we turn to God, and we turn to our sponsor, and we pick up the big-book, and we try to find *the prescription*...

Cat: Meow

Michael: ...for the symptoms... (Hey there! I gotta tell you a story about cats.) ...of our misery. See. The steps are not prescriptive medicine. They're prophylactic. Prophylaxis means that you do something to prevent disease from happening. A flu shot is prophylaxis. If in September or October we all go get a flu shot, then we're not gonna show up at a doctor asking him to *prescribe* for the symptoms of the flu. Why is that? 'Cause we don't have the flu. See, we've prevented the flu from happening. That's what the steps are about. Especially step ten, eleven, and twelve. And we all need to start looking at this as prophylaxis rather than prescription. Most of my life, I knew one prayer, and the prayer was, *God damn it*.

[Laughter]

Michael: Or, God damn you, or them, or it. Something like that. That was it. That was prayer for me.

Except when I was really in trouble. Then it was, God, get me out of this, and I promise I will never, ever, do this again. Some version of that. Look at all the heads nod.

[Laughter]

Michael: See. Now that kind of prayer, is that prophylaxis, or is that prescriptive?

Several people: Prescriptive.

Michael: Yeah, see. And what happened when God got you out of it? Did you go back and do it again?

Others: Yep.

Michael: Yeah. See, that's how much value prescriptive spirituality has in the world that we live in. Once you begin to understand this, you understand why people – sometimes with a great deal of time in AA – get loaded again, pick up again, disappear, have all this shit happen. Because this constant cycle of prescriptive spirituality does not suffice, does not work. And the basic reason for that is, still, with an alcoholic mind – it's the alcoholic mind trying to remember to rely on God. So it isn't a real reliance on God; it's a reliance on the self to rely on God. Everybody get that? We can claim anything we want to claim, we can believe anything we want to believe, but where the rubber meets the road – and that's called *our life* – it either works or it doesn't work. It's either prescriptive or prophylactic. And the proof is always in the pudding. And the proof is at the bottom page 83 and about two-hundred other places in the big-book, and they're called *the promises*.

CD 1, Track 4: Many Solutions versus One Solution

Michael: The promises aren't some *thing* that God gives *good* people. The promises are a clear and direct result of a course of action of prophylactic spirituality. Most of us, and it was clear to me, I thought, it was all about getting sober – if I do the steps, I'm gonna get sober. But that shows me I had a misunderstanding of what the big-book says. The big-book tells me that if I'm an alcoholic, I suffer from a disease that has two parts: one of them is physical, and one of them is mental, and neither one of them can be cured. Therefore, the book offers me a spiritual solution – a way to find an experience of a higher power. You can call him God, or you can call him Ralph, or you can call him Clark, or whatever you want to call God, or *her*... See, you can have any concept you want, but it's a spiritual solution to a disease of the body and the mind for which there is no solution. Now, a doctor that I worked with many years ago in Albuquerque, New Mexico told me that you can always tell the extent of the knowledge of the medical field about any specific disease by looking at the number of treatments available for it. If there are *a lot* of treatments, and they are widely varied, such as cancer or AIDS or something like that, then medicine doesn't understand the disease. When I was a kid, polio was a big thing. Anybody old enough to remember polio? Yeah. And Sister Kenny and iron lungs and... and all the stuff that... you know, it was a tragic disease, mostly struck children. So, who knows about polio anymore?

Person: Nobody.

Michael: So when I was a kid, medicine didn't know anything about polio, and now we know something

about polio, and hardly anybody knows what polio is. Someone found a solution. It was actually *two* someones, but the most famous one is Dr. Jonas Salk who developed a vaccine for it. Once he understood it, he came up with a solution. So now we don't have iron lungs and crippled kids and all that kind of stuff. And a lot of people under forty have never even heard of polio. It's an amazing thing. So in your experience, you look out there in the world, and how many different treatments are there for alcoholism? *Lots*. *Lots*. There are over seven-thousand treatment centers just in the United States alone, and they're all saying something different. And you go to psychiatrists, and they're saying something different, *still*. And you go to all these self-help groups, and they're saying something different, *still*. So nobody has actually solved the problem *apparently*.

Person: There's some pill out now that you hear advertised on the radio, too.

Michael: Sure, yeah. They're still trying to come up with chemicals that make or allow alcoholics to drink safely.

[Laughter]

Michael: Society is obsessed with drinking safely. Controlling and enjoying booze.

Person: "Drink responsibly."

Michael: "Just say no." All that kind of shit. It's amazing.

CD 1, Track 5: Who Are We Here for?

Michael: Another thing I would like you to consider while we're doing this over the next two days is: Who's the most important person in the room?

Person #1: It would be Sigrid, evidently.

[Laughter]

Sigrid: I am.

Michael: Okay. We just wanted to identify you...

[Laughter]

Michael: ...so we could all focus good energy your way.

Sigrid: Yes, yes, yes. Ooga-booga. I misinterpreted what you were asking.

[Laughter]

Michael: I understand... I'm not... As we go along, I'm probably gonna ask some of you to volunteer to just sort of get into some examples that I use, so please be aware that I'm not doing that to embarrass anybody. It's simply gonna be to make a point if it comes up. But let's get back to who's the most important person in the room. Either you're here to get sober for yourself or you're not. It's just a fact: You either are or you aren't. If you're here to do it for your kids or your husband or your boyfriend, or get

the judge off you're back, or your family, or whatever... then you probably ought to just close your book and leave. People in AA like to say that this is a selfish program. I don't buy that. To me, this is an unselfish program for selfish people. It's to allow us to move from a condition of selfishness and self-centeredness to a condition of *unselfishness* and altruistic action, which is where real spirituality can grow and thrive and things like that. So those of us who hang around, "I'm here for me," see, that's fine if you've got thirty days sober. But if you've got thirty *years* sober, I have a question about that. We have to have some sort of a transformational change occur. And that's what the big-book talks about. So, where's the power gonna come from for that change?

Person #3: God.

Michael: Can we chin it up, manufacture it somehow, our own will power? I don't know how many things *you've* tried in *your* life, but when I was new and going through the steps, I made *lists* of all the different things I tried over the years. It's amazing. Dressing for success.

[Laughter]

Michael: Power colors – what are your power colors? What's your power animal – and get an amulet for the power animal. Crystals. And all sorts of new-agey things. Religions. Psychiatry. See, all that, just, I mean, just on-and-on-and-on-and-on. Metaphysics. Self-help programs. "I'm okay, and you're okay." And new strategies for life. And yada-yada-yada-yada. And endless conversations with other endless, fucked-up people.

[Laughter]

Michael: And all reduced to, basically, it doesn't work, and a bunch of frothy emotional appeal where we sit around and link arms and sing Kumbaya, 'cause we're fucked. It doesn't work. We don't get *set free* somehow. In my experience, spirituality was always about other people. The other people who had it. Those folks who had *it*, whatever *it* is. The guy or the woman in the white robe sitting up on the stage saying the wise things. And then we would all walk out of the seminar, or the ashram, or the Dharma talk, or whatever it is, and we'd look at each other and go, "Isn't he wise," or, "Isn't she wise," and, "Wasn't the talk wonderful?" "Yes. How are you?" "I'm still fucked up." "How you gonna be tomorrow?" "Still fucked up." "You coming back?" "Oh yeah!"

[Laughter]

Michael: "I'm getting something out of this."

[Laughter continues]

Michael: And I just kept getting more fucked up about it, because it was always about *them*. So one of the things I'd like to share with you is that *you* – and by *you* I mean each and every one of you individually – can have the promises come true in your life, and it doesn't take all that long to do. But it takes things like the big-book talks about like willingness, honesty, open-mindedness. It takes having an understanding of the disease of alcoholism, and why we have to let that go – realize that we can not solve the problem ourselves, and why we must have a spiritual experience. *Or*, we get to keep singing

Kumbaya..... Anybody else tired of being fucked up?

CD 1, Track 6: Michael's Story, Part One

Michael: I came to AA in 1982. Had my last drink on July 28th, 1982. So my first day of sobriety is really July 29th 1982. And for the next year, I attended probably well over six-hundred AA meetings. I was way over “ninety meetings in ninety days.” In every one of them, I was dishonest, I was closed-minded, I was arrogant, selfish. I was concerned about how I looked and how I sounded. I was living in fear. I didn't give a shit whether you stayed sober or not, though I acted like I did. I had a great act. I memorized all the AA clichés in not very long – less than a month – and I could string 'em together with the best of them. “Keep coming back, live and let live, one day at a time, think-think-think, I've earned my seat here. Meeting makers stay sober. People who don't make meetings, they are the ones who drink.” All that, see. And you can string those together in any form you want, and come up with a pitch that will last ten minutes, and get a whole room full of people going, “Yeah, man, this guy knows what he's talking about.” So that's what I did pretty much. It was a miserable time with periods of kind of cool stuff. I really didn't want to be in AA the rest of my life. My future to me looked kind of like whatever the other side of the moon must look like, where it's dark and there aren't any trees and the sun never shines and there is no fun and you stumble around and fall into craters and things like that. See, sobriety looked like this terrible, awful, lonely, no-fun, fucked-up place to be. Those are words – the feeling and attitude behind that point of view was pretty miserable, and it's hard to put that into words. I think you all know what I'm talking about. The words are one thing, the actual experience of it is something else. I'm a real alcoholic, and this idea of living sober with a bunch of other people who are alternately whining and singing Kumbaya just really sucked. It really sucked. But AA for me was the last house on the block. There was no where else for me to go. If I didn't make it here, what was gonna happen? I had to make it here. So, I was forced into this position of just pretending to be, you know, little good AA guy, and showing up, and doing all this stuff. I got commitments at meeting and became secretary and became a treasurer and did all that stuff. First meeting I was treasurer of, I stole the treasury. So that was fun, climbing up. I took two pases through the steps. I wrote my first fourth step by thirty days, and I did the fifth step. I had like zero understanding of step six or step seven. I made a couple of amends. Step ten seemed like a good idea if I got in trouble, maybe sort of kind of. And step eleven, fuck that.

[Laughter]

Michael: Step twelve was pretty much, if I found a newcomer who needed a ride to a meeting, I would take them. And that was sort of it. So that was my program. And that lasted about three months, something like that. And the creeping “ughhhhhh” started to squeeze on me again. So someone suggested, maybe you better do the steps again. So I did. Only this time, I didn't use the big-book, I used some treatment center fourth step guide. And boy, did that spin me around.

[Laughter]

Michael: What the hell, you know. It was these detailed questions from two seconds after birth up to current day. It was about *this thick*... hundreds of these sons-a-bitches. So I wrote all that out, and did a

fifth step with *that*, and made a couple more amends, and went right back to doing what I had done before. No change.

CD 1, Track 7: Michael's Story, Part 2

Michael: I need to tell you the dieting and the ding-dong story. At about nine months sober, I had a part-time job. I was driving a limousine and being a tour guide out in Palm Springs – driving a bus around with a little microphone and following all these people from Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where Elvis Presley lived before he died. Movie star houses, and all this sort of shit. On a limousine run one night, I was in an AM/PM mini-mart. I was getting a cup of coffee over in the back, and as I was pouring the coffee, the bell on the door rang. Without turning around, I had this *ughhhhhh*... I knew something was wrong. You know, you have those feelings sometimes... I knew something was *not* right. So I slowly looked around, and walking in the door was a guy I owed some amends to. His name was Ray M. I hadn't seen Ray M. in six or seven years. He's a guy who used to work for me. He came walking in wearing tennis clothes to the point where he had one of those stupid tennis sweaters tied...

[Laughter]

Michael: ...around his shoulders. You know those kind of guys who look like, East coast kind of guys. *Ugh*.

[Laughter]

Person #1: Hey, look out!

Michael: Where you can't wear white after... whatever.

Everyone: Labor day!

[Laughter]

Michael: So anyway, Ray comes in, and he's paying for his gas. I immediately know that I owed Ray some amends, and that what I ought to do is set down my cup of coffee, go “cool,” and walk up to Ray, and ask him if he had a minute and talked to him. Is that what I did? No. This is one of those places where the rubber meets the road. So what I did was grab my cup of coffee, and I turned to my left where there was a rack of ding-dongs. You know, fried pies and twinkies and ding-dongs and cupcakes, shit like that. And literally, I literally *stuck my face* into the ding-dong, and I was doing *this* while I was watching until he paid for his gas, walked out, got in his BM-fucking-W, and drove away. And when he drove away, I went *whew*, and I went over and bought my coffee. But while I was doing that, it just crashed on me that the rubber had just met the road. And something my sponsor told me six or eight months before was, “Mike, life's gonna make a liar out of you.” And life just did. Life just showed me I was still a coward. Life had just showed me I was still selfish. Life just showed me I wasn't practicing spiritual principles. Life just showed me I had no faith. Life just showed me I wasn't relying on God. Life just showed me I was full of fear. And I realized right then what a phony I was, how everything I had been saying and doing in AA up to that point was all a sham. All of it. And here I was, Mister Ninety-Day-

Wonder AA Guy who knew all the clichés. What my sponsor predicted had just come true. It really crushed me. Something inside me really went *ughhhh*. And I knew that I wasn't going to be able to maintain this happy-sober-I'm-okay act in AA anymore after that. It was a pretty awful experience. I went to my home group, one of the meetings I was going to, the next night, and I shared about this experience. I told them what I just told you in a little more detail. A lot of what I got was, “Some are sicker than others; don't be so hard on yourself; this too shall pass.” All the clichés I had been putting out just came back to me. See, nobody walked up to me and said, “Hey, buddy, you need a spiritual experience.” Nobody said, “This is good, you can grow from this.” Everybody either tried to make it go away and pat me on the back, or just told me I was an asshole, which I was. I already knew that. And that set off a period of depression – sober – that lasted two or three months, and it got to the point where I couldn't get out of bed. And every two or three days, I would get out of bed, take a shower, and go to an AA meeting. I'd get all the, “Hey Mike! How you doing?” “Fine. Never better.” And I'd sit there, and I'd attend. And I wouldn't feel any better, and I'd go home, and I'd get back in bed, pull the covers over. Couldn't talk to anybody. Couldn't answer the phone. Had no idea what the hell was going on with me. But it was starting to dawn on me that I was gonna go get drunk again. And I went through this battle on the inside which ended up with the realization that I was either truly going to drink again and suffer whatever consequences happened from beginning to drink again – and a pretty clear knowledge that if I started, I wasn't gonna stop – and the alternative to that was finding a gun and blowing my brains out.

CD 1, Track 8: A Hopeless Condition

Michael: The big-book in chapter three gives us an example of a guy named Fred, and one of the things Fred says, one that starts to dawn on him – what step one's about – is that he had never been able to understand people who said that a problem had them hopelessly defeated. He says, “I knew then,” – and it's a crushing blow.... Let me give you a current example. If you can, especially those of you who are from New York, try to imagine yourself as someone on September 11th, 2001 working on floor number ninety of the World Trade Center. You came to work like you ordinarily come to work, and you're talking on the phone, drinking your coffee, or doing something on your computer and – *bam* – this thing happens. The room you're in is on fire. And not just a fire in a trashcan, I mean this whole thing is ablaze. You're over here by this window, and there is no where to go, and you have a choice: You can stay where you are and fry, or you can jump out that window. That's it. Life just did something really fucked up to you. And some people – there's films of them – that was the better option for them. They jumped out the window. It's hard to even imagine what that must have been like for them. That's it. It's choose which way you're gonna die. That's what I was facing when it came to step one. Is it gonna be quick or is it gonna be slow? But it's gonna be. And there was no way out of it – no meeting, no Kumbaya, no more seminars, no more books, no more frothy emotional appeal, no more hugs, no more sex, no more meals, no more music, no more – nothing is gonna fix it. Nowhere to go. Zip. It's over. Step one. Powerless over alcohol. And my life was clearly unmanageable, and I was a year sober at the time.

CD 1, Track 9: Page 151

Michael: We want to go to page 151. Everybody got a book, and is everybody there? 151. This is the first page of A Vision for You. It says, “For most normal folks, drinking means conviviality, companionship, and colorful imagination. It means relief from care, boredom, and worry.” What did Dr. Silkworth call that in the Doctor's Opinion? A sense of ease and comfort that comes at once by drinking or by getting loaded. “It's joyous intimacy with friends and a feeling that life is good. But not so with us in those last days of heavy drinking. The old pleasures were gone, they were but memories, and never could we recapture the great moments of the past. There was an insistent yearning to enjoy life as we once did and a heartbreaking obsession that some new *miracle of control* would enable us to do it, and there was always one more attempt and one more failure.” Try, try again. Never give up. Don't let the bastards get you down. You can do it. “The less people tolerated...” look at your own experience. Are these things true of you when you drink? “The less people tolerated us...” Did people become intolerant of you? The sure do of me. A lot of people got tired of my shit. “...the more we withdrew from society.” In AA, we like to call that, “I'm isolating.” “Oh, I'm isolating.” No, you're withdrawing from society. From life itself. It's classic alcoholic stuff. “As we became subjects of King Alcohol, shivering denizens of his mad realm, the chilling vapor that is loneliness settled down.” How many people in here have been lonely? You don't have to raise your hand, just ask yourself. How much loneliness has there been in all this for you, even sober. And we're gonna talk about that again in a minute. “It thickened, even becoming blacker.” Love that lonely depression, and the self-pity, and the crap that goes with that. “Some of us sought out sordid places, hoping to find understanding, companionship, and approval. Momentarily, we did. And then would come oblivion and the awful awakening to face the hideous Four Horsemen.” These were my four best friends. “Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration, and Despair.” They never abandoned me. These guys are *loyal*. “Unhappy drinkers who read this page will understand.” Now here comes the paragraph that describes what I just shared of my experience. “Now and then, a serious drinker –” and I clearly was a serious drinker – “being dry at the moment –” I was one year dry – “says the words, the act, 'I don't miss it at all. Feel better. Work better. Having a better time. I'm fine.' As ex-problem drinkers, we smile at such a sally. We know our friend is like a boy whistling in the dark to keep up his spirits.” Have you ever done that, whistle in the dark because you were scared? “He fools...” who?

Person: Himself.

Michael: Yeah. My sponsor looked me in the eye one day and said, “Mike, my boy, you can fool me, you can fool the people in AA, you can fool your boss, you can fool your parents, you can fool *yourself*.” He says, “There's two things you can't fool. One of them's God, and the other one's the obsession to drink alcohol. “He fools himself. Inwardly, he would give anything to take half a dozen drinks and get away with it.” See, that's the obsession, to do it safely. To get some relief from the terror, frustration, bewilderment, and despair, the shit, *ughhhh*, that's going on. But knowing we can't do it safely, but really wishing we could do it safely. “He will --” and it doesn't say *he might* or *he could*, “He *will* presently try the old game again, for he isn't happy about his sobriety.” And I clearly was not happy about my sobriety at that point. “He cannot picture life without alcohol --” that's the dark side of the moon – “and someday

he will be unable to imagine life either with alcohol or without it.” And that's the real alcoholic who clearly cannot drink safely, but also can't be sober safely either. And that's the part that most of us don't understand. Can't imagine life with it, or we can't imagine life without it. It says, “Then he will know loneliness such as few do and he will be...” where? “And he will wish for the end.” Lots of people in AA, sober people, commit suicide. Lots of them.

CD 1, Track 10: Page 151, Substitute *Alcohol for Fellowship*

Michael: So now I'm gonna show you something which you may find as amazing as I do about this book. Let's go back, we're gonna read this again, I'm gonna change a few words. Just follow along as I read, and notice that I'm gonna change some words.

Michael: For most new people in AA, AA meetings and fellowship mean conviviality, companionship, and colorful imagination. Meetings and fellowship mean release from care, boredom, and worry. AA is joyous intimacy with our newfound sober friends and a feeling that sobriety is good. But not so with us in those last days of heavy meeting-going. The pleasures of early sobriety are gone. They were but memories. Never could we recapture the great moments of our early sobriety. *The pink cloud?* There was an insistent yearning to enjoy AA as we once did and a heartbreaking obsession that some new miracle of control would enable us to do that. There was always one more attempt and one more failure. The less AA people tolerated us, the more we withdrew from the fellowship, from life itself. As we became subjects of King Alcohol – *'cause that's what's happening* – shivering denizens of his mad realm, the chilling vapor that is – *what?* Loneliness. *Look at your own experience, ask yourself if that's happened to you in AA.* It thickened, ever becoming blacker. Some of us sought out some of those low-life AA meetings where people sing a lot of Kumbaya, hoping to find understanding, companionship, and approval. Momentarily, we did. *It doesn't last, does it?* Then would come oblivion and the awful awakening, sober, to face the hideous Four Horsemen: Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration, and Despair. Unhappy sober drinkers who read this page will understand. *Why will they understand? That's our experience. This is exactly what happened to me, one year sober.* Now and then, a serious AA member, being dry at the moment, says, “I don't miss it at all. Feel better. Work better. Having a better time.” As ex-problem AA members, we smile at such a sally. We know our friend is like a boy whistling in the dark to keep up his spirits. “Going to more meetings. Gonna read the book. Gonna call my sponsor.” He fools – *who?* Himself.

Michael: It's a question you gotta start asking yourself. Are you fooling yourself about your sobriety? “Inwardly, he'd give anything to take half a dozen drinks and get away with it. He will – “not might or could – “he will presently try the old game again.” Why? He isn't happy. What's the opposite of happy? Sad. It's the one word you hardly ever hear in a meeting. They'll say, “I'm fucked up, I'm pissed, I'm depressed. I'm this, I'm that. I'm an ax murderer, I'm a rapist.” But never, “I'm sad. My life is just fucking sad. Sobriety sucks.” Cannot picture life without alcohol. He's still driven by that obsession. Cunning, baffling, powerful obsession. “Someday, he will be unable to imagine life either with alcohol or without it.” And that's what happens to people in AA. Sobriety is so painful, and their prospect of a

relapse is so terrifying, they'll drive into a bridge, or jump off a building, pills. "Then he will know loneliness such as few do." There's that lonely thing that needs to be looked at again. "He will be at the jumping off place, and he will wish for the end." Just ask yourself, have you ever gotten up somewhere in your sobriety and just wished it would all go away? All this crap that's going on? I always find it very interesting that this chapter is titled *A Vision for You*, and this is the vision.

[Laughter]

Michael: See, you're gonna kill yourself. Or wish that you could. That's the first part of the vision. If you think you can somehow do a tap dance around the *truth* of your alcoholism and the *truth* of the solution, this is what you have to look forward to. It's all about experience. Some people have had this experience already. I assume that at least one or two of you have had it, or are having it. The rest of you... you can call this something to look forward to.

[Laughter]

Michael: I'm not the kind of AA-working-with-others person who will pat somebody on the back and say, "There there, it's gonna be alright." 'Cause it isn't gonna be alright if you're an alcoholic. It ain't ever gonna *get* alright. It's gonna get *worse*. However bad it's been in your life, it's gonna get worse. If you're sober and unhappy, that's gonna get worse. That's not gonna go way, it ain't fixable. Step one. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives are unmanageable.

CD 1, Track 11: Experience and Unmanageability

Michael: I would like to go over what we call Page 52. Before we get into this, let's just talk about experience. If you would, everybody close your eyes. Imagine that Fred and Michelle have a couple of ball-peen hammers. And each of them has one. And we're gonna ask you to hold your hand out in front of you, palm down, and Fred and Michelle are gonna come and whack you in the middle of your hand with a ball-peen hammer. What comes to your mind there? Pain? Fear? Yeah. End up at the doctor, "God, I won't be able to use my hand." There's a whole lot of stuff you could *imagine*, because you have some experience in life about pain. But, see, if they actually came over and did it to you, you'd have an experience of it. And whatever that experience, you really couldn't put that into words, could you? See. You'd have a reaction; you'd be pissed; you'd probably be crying, see, it would hurt like a son-of-a-gun. The experience of it is very different from what you imagine. The imagination is bad enough, but the actual experience, that would suck. So, for those of us who want to begin to want to find something called *the truth* about all this, the only place we find the truth is by looking at our experience. Learning things out of a book is good, but it's not all that helpful. Hearing some yo-yo like me sit here and blab at you about stuff is good, but it's not gonna do you any good unless you look at your own experience. Reading the big-book is interesting stuff in a theoretical or understanding sense about alcoholism, but it does you absolutely no good if you don't look at your own experience. The big-book says in the forward to the first edition that this is an account of our experiences. And those of us who are real alcoholics, when we read the book, can ask ourselves at almost every word – certainly every sentence, and definitely at every paragraph – what our experience of this is. Is this true about me? Experience is where you find

truth. Seminars and other people and all that, books, that isn't where you find truth. The only place you find truth is at looking at your own experience. And the big-book describes lots of experiences. Page 52 is about experience, and it's about experience sober. So we want to go to the middle of page 52. I'm gonna read the paragraph, and then I'm gonna ask everybody here to look at your own experience. Today. See what's going on today. And let's see what's true and what's false. It says, "We had to ask ourselves why we shouldn't apply to our human problems the same readiness to change our point of view. We were having trouble with personal relationships." So look at your own experience and ask yourself, do you have trouble with your relationships? And we're not talking just about the kind of relationships that involve sex. How 'bout with bosses and other drivers and people in general and your families and your children.

Person #1: People in the fellowship.

Michael: Yeah. Other AA people. Do you have trouble in your relationships? Is that your experience? And how long has that been going on? And have you ever been able to solve it? And have you put a lot of effort into it?

Person #2: Try, try again!

Michael: Never give up! Damned be he who quits and says, "*enough!*" Try some more! Has it ever occurred to you maybe you don't have any power. Has it ever occurred to you maybe it ain't fixable by you? Number two. "We couldn't control our emotional natures." So everybody kind of has a little grasp on this. Look at your own experience. Emotions are what? Things like anger and fear and sadness.

Person #1: Hysteria.

Michael: Hysteria. Yeah. See, all kinds of stuff. Ask yourself, can you control that? How much has it plagued you in your life? How much problem has it caused? How much does it cause you today? And do you wish you had control? And ask yourself, why do people go to anger management classes? So they can control their emotional nature. And why do people go through those walking-on-coals seminars? So they can control their fear, their emotional nature. And there's just tons of that stuff out there in the world, which is designed to teach people to control their emotional natures. I've been through a bunch of that kind of stuff, and I'm sure that some of you also have. And ask yourself, after all that effort and after all this time, is it under control? Is it? Do you think that the problem here might be you don't have the power to fix that? Your life is unmanageable. Number three. "We were a prey to misery and depression." Oh, boy. How many times has something good either occurred or begun to occur, and as soon as it has either occurred or begun to occur, you start to experience fear because you know somebody's gonna walk into your life and take it away, step on it, it's gonna flee, it won't last. Immediately. You can't even enjoy a nice day or a good meal or whatever. A prey to misery and depression. Where's it come from, we don't know. Where's it going? Where does it go when I'm not experiencing it, I don't know. Is it coming back? Yes.

[Laughter]

Michael: One of AA's favorite clichés is, "This too shall pass." As if that's a solution to anything.

[Laughter]

Michael: Yes it is true, it's going to pass. Yes, it is also true it's going in a circle. It's coming back. And it's gonna be back quicker than it came around this time.

Person #3: This too shall return.

Michael: Yeah, that's a better way to put it. This too shall return. So we try to just grit our teeth and let it pass, and it does, but it comes back knocking on your door, doesn't it? Prey to misery and depression. For those of you who don't understand the difference between a predator and a prey: Think of an eagle flying around over a field, and down here is a field mouse living in a hole. The field mouse comes out of its hole, and it wants to eat some grass, but it can't enjoy eating the grass because it has to keep one eye on that eagle. Which is the predator and which is the prey? Eagle is the predator; the field mouse is the prey. So, the eagle doesn't see the field mouse this time, so he circles, and he's on down the valley. Now the field mouse is outside the hole, wants to eat some grass, and there is no eagle. And the field mouse lights a smoke, crosses his legs, and goes, "That's cool?" No. Why? 'Cause he knows the eagle's coming back. Eagle or no eagle, he's gonna be looking. Look at misery and depression as the predator – or the eagle – and look at yourself as the field mouse, and ask yourself if that's your experience in life. Whether it's eating your lunch or not eating your lunch, are you always aware of it and its imminent return. Just look at your own experience. We couldn't control our emotional natures and were a prey to misery and depression... drunk or sober. That was my experience in life. "We couldn't make a living." That doesn't say we didn't have a job. Some of us have jobs, some of us don't have jobs. Some of us are employable, and some of us aren't employable. Very few of us are doing what we love or want to do. Couldn't make a living. Look at your own experience. Making a living, and take the first two or three things we just looked at, and ask yourself, what impact did those things – trouble with relationships, and out of control emotional nature, and having a prey to misery and depression – has on making a living. Any impact at all? Negligible? A lot? Hm. "We had a feeling of uselessness." We all hate to admit this one. It was a big resentment of mine. But I really thought I had nothing to offer the world. What I didn't want to admit is that it was *fact* that I *was* useless. And it was my experience that I was being useless. That I really had nothing to offer anybody, though I wanted to. But *wanting to* and actually *doing* are two totally different things. Good intentions are great, but what did I really have to offer? Ask yourself, what do you really have to offer? It's a difficult question. For me, it wasn't a *feeling* of uselessness, it was a fact: I *was* useless. And that *feeling* I was having was just, *ughh*, I don't want to admit this to myself. But that's where one gets in a selfish, self-centered alcoholic condition. I was useless in AA. I could talk a good game. But some fucked-up newcomer walked in? I would direct them to somebody else who seemed to know what they were doing, because I didn't have anything to offer them. I didn't know what to do, how to help them. I ran. I ran from service opportunities. Because I was afraid. It's interesting. Feeling of uselessness. Full of fear. Boy, I hated to admit that. I was diagnosed by a psychiatrist as having an anxiety neurosis, comma, severe. Which means, you're full of fear. Actually, terror. Constantly, 24/7. I just lived in a state of fear. See, fear to me was sort of like drinking was. I had to be at least legally drunk, you know, like... What is the limit for drinking? 0.01?

[People offer different answers]

Michael: 0.08? Well, it's been lowered. Let's say it's *one*. See, that was the threshold that I considered normal. I would feel okay. At that level of intoxication. Anything less than that, I was totally jumpy and jittery. And drunk for me was probably up in the *threes*, where I was aware that I was drunk. What normal people would consider legally drunk was a normality for me when it came to alcohol. The same thing was true with fear. See, fear had to escalate to panic or terror in order for me to be aware of it. When I wasn't actually being threatened by somebody or something, then I just drifted back to this level of constant fear, and that's where I lived my life. Drunk or sober. Full of fear. Did I want *you* to know that? No. That's not cool. That's not hip or slick. That doesn't match the happy sober guy act. So I couldn't tell you that. Okay, "We were unhappy." There's a three letter word for *unhappy*. It starts with an S and ends with a D. The unspoken word. *Sad*. So just ask yourself, how much sadness you got going on underneath the acts? Underneath the bravado? Underneath the lookin' good? Underneath everything else? What's your experience? And the last one may be the worst one: "We couldn't seem to be a real help to other people." And that was certainly true of me. Other than a ride to a meeting, that was pretty much it in Alcoholics Anonymous. And as far as my family went, relationships, I was like no help. I was just a drain on people. That's why they didn't tolerate me too much. Even if I wasn't trying to con them out of something, I was definitely sucking air out of their atmosphere just by my presence. I was one of those people that, you know, if you're in the same room with me you start going...

[Michael pretends to gasp for air]

Michael: That kind of stuff. So this is the book's definition of the second half of step one, our lives had become unmanageable. What's your experience? Just look at your own experience. Can you manage this stuff? Can you fix it?

CD 2, Track 1: Michelle Shares

Michelle: Hi, I'm Michelle. It's good to be here, 'cause... This program does take a lot of work. There's a lot to learn, and there's a lot to learn about my alcoholism. Because it's not just *staying sober*. I'm really glad to be learning more about this step one and more about all the different ways it plays in my life. Because, I will read every book someone puts in front of me, I will do anything to find answers for myself. So I'd like to be more open to spiritual experience... Just open minded, I guess. I really feel like, most days, I feel like the little mouse looking up, just waiting to be picked up or stomped on or something. I don't think that's very happy, joyous, and free. But I try to be gentle with myself, because it's only been sixteen months. And there's been a huge change in that time. There has been, because when I came in, I was just so full of shame and fear, and I still am, but that's all I could see of myself. So that's the nasty stuff that got me here. And I'm still working through that. I'm just grateful to be here today, so thank you.

CD 2, Track 2: Eighteen Years Dry

Person #1: I'll share. The thing that I got out of this morning, most of all, was a deep reminder that I am

not responsible for how sick I got in sobriety. It makes me wanna cry, because I lived, like you were saying, I don't know how people live and suffer in sobriety for so long and don't drink. I don't know how I didn't drink either. It's just that I was trying so hard to be little Ms. Good AA, and good mom, and good employee – good, good, good, good, good, good – and it was, like, using my own will power and constantly hitting walls. Thinking it was 'cause it was something wrong with me that I had control over, but that you know, it was all over my fourth step where I felt lazy. It kept showing up. I kept, even in the fourth column looking at my part, I was still seeing myself as lazy. Michael was the first person to say, maybe it's not laziness, maybe it's lack of power. And for me to be reminded of the importance – the obstacle to my recovery and the obstacle to me being of service is me thinking that I had a choice, that I had control over what was happening to me before and after sobriety. When I met Michael he said, how long have you been sober, and I think at that time it was seventeen years, and his response to that – 'cause he could see the unmanageability in my life – and he said, Nice try.

[Laughter]

Person #1: And I'm like, Fuck you and your nice try! Yeah, it's a nice try! It's a fucking *nice* try! And I was just all offended by that, because it was all I had was *trying*. And I kept *trying*. And I am a good try-er, but I am not a good letter-go-er. And what I learned was the obstacle to letting go, and having this surrender was being told that it was okay for me to be having the feelings that I was having. It was *okay* for me to turn to God and ask God to help me accept myself. Nobody had ever given me a break or given me a green light to give myself a break. I didn't know it was even remotely okay to give myself a break. I just thought my whole life is all about struggle and climbing out of these holes I've put myself into. And it's like this constant cycle of trying. And my first step experience was brutal this time around. But it was the most important, life saving, *real experience* that I had in sobriety. It was the most real experience I've had in almost nineteen years, was having a first step experience where I somehow was able to start being honest about where I was at, even though it didn't really look all that good. Because, believe me, when you go eighteen years and you're all fucked up, people are like, they look at you like, what is wrong with you? And I literally said in a meeting one day, I am restless, irritable, and discontent, and this girl with like a year said, no you're not. And I'm like, *yeah*, yeah I am.

[Laughter]

And she's like, well, it's not like that. I mean, she couldn't hear that. So it's been a good reminder today that maybe, just maybe, it ain't your fault. That is a mantra or something. Whew. I can give myself a break; I can give you a break. I don't have to be judge, jury, and executioner of anybody in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. I can let you have what you're having. And I'm getting better and better at that by the grace of God, where I actually do feel genuine compassion for people who don't quite get along with others, the people who are a maybe a little too loud or a little too quiet. Like, the people who don't quite fit? – those are the ones my heart is starting to pour out to, 'cause it's like, there's a place for us now. What makes me sad is the all the messages and all the misinformation that gets passed through that makes it into the rooms of AA that has nothing to do with a spiritual program. And that makes me sad, because I see people trying really hard like I did, and I know that they're headed for a big fall or a death – drinking, certainly. I'm having a really solid sobriety experience, and my relationship with God is getting

more and more comfortable. It's not like something I *try* to do now. My relationship with God is very personal, it's very comfortable. It's not something that I'm... I stopped *trying* to have a relationship with God. I think that's the other thing that I would say, it's the hugest thing I've gotten out of doing this work. It's just happening. It's like Kelly was saying, it's just *happening*, it's not something that I *do*. I was forced into being open minded, forced into submitting. So thanks to you and all the support I get from my brothers and sisters in sobriety, I'm reasonably sure that I have found a permanent solution to my problem.

CD 2, Track 3: Deborah Shares

Deborah: My name is Deborah, and I am an alcoholic.

All: Hey, Deborah.

Deborah: And I'm really happy to be here too. I totally looked forward to coming to this workshop because even though I've been in this program for a while, I feel like I've never had a first step experience, or a spiritual experience, or that I've really worked the steps. Through the circumstances that were definitely God-driven, I got involved with Michelle as my sponsor a short time ago, and it's been a definite blessing. I think it's gonna save my life. I am involved in a lot of ways in this fellowship, like you were talking about. I am a treasurer, and I had sponsees, and for my first fifteen months went to thirty-six meetings a week. I went to a treatment center, was there for sixty days, I did jump in with two feet and wanted to do whatever I could to stay sober. And I definitely am living on page 52. I have given up sponsees, and I am trying to keep my commitments, but I'm okay to let them go, too, just so I don't die. So, that's all I want to say. Thanks.

Michael: Thirty-six meetings a week? You are my kind of alcoholic.

[Laughter]

Michael: That's very cool. I understand that. Let me guarantee you, just like the big-book, this will work for you. You can find it in chapter four if you want to look. Black and white, on the page. You cannot fail. I'm really glad you're here.

CD 2, Track 4: Josh Shares

Josh: I'm Josh, I'm an alcoholic.

All: Hi, Josh.

Josh: You know, your analogy to people on 9/11, it's pretty appropriate. And I don't say that to trivialize what they went through, but just to really bring home for me, that's what this was about. I don't really have a choice. For those of you who don't know me, I'll tell my story briefly. I was an out-of-control teenager. I was exposed to the program first when I was about fifteen. I was kind of in-and-out for about five years, and when I was twenty, I got clean, and was able – I can see now – through force of will, to stay sober for nine years. At first, I wanted to be the model AA. As I began to deal with life, I started to

try all these variety of other things: John Bradshaw, and M. Scott Peck, and all the different meditation centers, and therapy, and all this stuff. I reached a point at about six or seven years, I had been doing a lot of meditation, and I started to experience real loss in my life. Nothing was working. I began to see that I was using everything the same way I had been using alcohol, and that my whole life was just a sham. I think I was really pissed off. I kind of stopped believing in God. I think I realized I wasn't going to find *it*, whatever *it* was, and I was expecting to find it, and that had been my expectation in AA. Now, in retrospect, a little over two years back in AA, I think that relapsing was really the best thing that ever happened to me, because I never would have been able to buy into anything that you're saying if I hadn't picked up. All of the shit that was going on in my life, that was just my issues, right?, and I was dealing with it. That was my life: Trying to fix this issue, and then unfortunately, another issue would pop up. And I'd try to fix that issue.

[Laughter]

And *another one* would pop up. And it just was never-ending.

Michael: Whack-a-mole.

[Laughter]

Josh: Right! Exactly. And so for me to come to the place where I believed that that was my alcoholism, that that is the insanity, sober, it's there. I had to drink. It's not something that I would recommend going to try, certainly, but it needed to happen for me to get to the point where I was willing to even take a look at that, that maybe all of these things are the same thing. Maybe it's my alcoholism. The experience of powerlessness while drinking is something I don't ever want to repeat. But it took experiencing that level of powerlessness in sobriety to get to the point where I was willing to really take step one, and really *wanting* to work the step, and *wanting* what the big-book offers. I didn't want to go through that leveling of my pride. I didn't want to give up. I didn't want to give up my control. It's terrifying. It's jumping out of a bridge or burning. For me, I also can't really say what it is that happens in step one, other than a certain type of tension and struggle just stopped. It was really kind of like, I would almost say, when I took step two, then I knew I had taken step one. For the first time, I just let go. That's the only simple way to put it. But it wasn't *me* trying to force God to do something *for me*. And that had been my experience. It was just, *I can't do it*. That was it. And it sounds simple, but it's not. Not in my experience, anyway. So, that's it.

CD 2, Track 5: Julie Shares

Julie: I'm Julie, I'm an alcoholic.

All: Hi, Julie.

Julie: I'm not really clear on what we're supposed to share about. I've just been hearing different things. I'm just gonna start rambling, and stop me if I go to far. When I was using, I never tried to control it, because I knew I couldn't and I didn't want to. So my goal was to go overboard every time. There was no

question about ever coming out of it, I never tried to control it. I never tried, "I won't drink." I never tried to rationalize it all. I'm a control freak and a perfectionist, and if I'm gonna do something, I'm gonna do it really well, so if I was gonna try and control it, I knew I couldn't, so therefore, why bother? If I couldn't do something really good, I wouldn't do it at all. Getting sober for me wasn't a choice, because I was so miserable, I wanted to die. I didn't really want to die, but I did not want to continue living the way I was living and the way I was feeling. So it was an easy choice, because I knew I was powerless over drugs and alcohol. I couldn't stop, I didn't want to stop, and I knew that that was my powerless point was that I didn't want to even though I was feeling like I wanted to die. It's just really fucked up and sick. There was something, and I thought it was just depressed and a pill would fix it, right, so then I went to a psychologist, and there was one moment in there where I was driving to him to see this doctor a week before I quit everything, and I was completely honest in his office about the amount of drugs and alcohol I was doing on a daily basis. That was the first time to anyone I had been honest in years and years. That was, I think, the first step towards taking my first step. I wanted to stop feeling the pain that I was feeling. The drugs and alcohol were not taking that away anymore. I was willing to try and stop everything to get better, or get good, or all those things that you talked about that – you know, it's not that we're bad trying to be good – but I just wanted to do something different. I knew I was powerless, and I knew that I needed to change everything, so I walked away from my house. I left everything. I got sober, I had a bag of clothes and stayed on my friends' couches. I got together with my friend who was thirty-five days more sober than me, which was like, *oh my God, you have so much time!* So him and I got together when I was like six seconds sober. I did three, two meetings a day and walked to meetings. And I did *not* walk anywhere. I walked from the car door to the front door, because I didn't do stuff like that. So I had to let go of all that bullshit, let it go and get away so I could do what I needed to do, 'cause I was willing to do anything not to feel what I was feeling anymore. And I knew I was powerless, I just knew it. And thank God I've always had that connection with God. Even when I was high and using, I would still talk to God, just pray that I would not get busted right now.

[Laughter]

Julie: And so when I got sober, I knew how to talk to God. Thank God. So I didn't have to have a major awakening that I was powerless over alcohol as well as drugs. Or different things. 'Cause I knew it. I think the last few years of my sobriety, I just got five years this year, and I've been doing life. I haven't been doing what I did my first year, which was what I need to do. The meetings. Work with a sponsor. The first steps were okay. I want to have a memorable spiritual experience of how to be a spiritual program. Have sponsor that I call. I don't do that shit anymore, 'cause I'm caught up in life. And I don't want it to be like that, 'cause I've heard a lot of people that get five years... you don't see a lot of kinks between five and ten years because people get dry or get relapsed or they get caught up in life. Now I'm like, okay, so I've made a choice that I don't want to be like that. And then, God, do for me what I can't do for myself. He put people in my life, and meetings in my life, and meetings at my life so I can make meetings with my baby and stuff. God hasn't done for me what I couldn't do for myself in a few years, 'cause I haven't done shit for a few years. I have my first [inaudible], and I'm really grateful for that, and I'm grateful for those things.

CD 2, Track 6: Struggle versus Surrender

Michael: Anybody feeling tired yet?

Many: Yeah.

Michael: This is hard work. It is. Doing this stuff, it will tucker you out. So if you're getting tired, that means you're probably opening your mind a little and starting to be honest. So that's good. Everybody see this thing I've put up on this board here? *Struggle is the indicator of...* what?

Some: Non-acceptance

Others: Alcoholism

Michael: *Alcoholism*. Untreated alcoholism going on in us while we're sober. And so we struggle. I'm gonna read the definition of *struggle*, and as I'm reading it, listen to it, apply it to your own experience with whatever issues or problems you think you have in your life. "To make strenuous or violent efforts in the face of difficulties or opposition. To proceed with difficulty or with great effort. An act of strongly motivated striving." See? Back of page 52. Struggling with relationships, emotions, depression, fear, sadness, working, families, sobriety, AA, the steps, everything. Look around in your life and see if you can find some place where no struggling is happening.

[Laughter]

[Michael play-snores]

[More laughter]

Michael: Struggle is *the* indicator of non-acceptance. And the solution to struggle is surrender. It's the only solution I ever found. It's the only solution I ever heard of. It was either surrender, or you get to keep fighting with it all: yourself, judging yourself, beating yourself up, going through whatever shit you're going through, watching it get worse, eventually relapsing, coming back to AA – going, "I chose to drink" – doing it again, sober again, drunk again, more broken relationships, on-and-on-and-on-and-on. It's just things you gotta ask yourself. Okay, we're back to the Doctor's Opinion again. World War II, there's a number of times where soldiers in the United States army, the world's greatest army, had to surrender to the Germans. It's a fucked-up thing. They didn't want to do that. And if you take any individual World War II American soldier and put them in a room this size with Adolf Hitler and said, "Fight to the death," who do you think would win? The soldier in every single case. So there wasn't any *single* American soldier – even a cook, I think – who couldn't have kicked Adolf Hitler's ass given one-on-one in a room. They weren't afraid of or surrendering to Adolf Hitler. What were they surrendering to?

Josh: Insurmountable odds.

Michael: Insurmountable odds, right. Evidence. It had nothing to do with Hitler. It had nothing to do with Germany. See, they found themselves in the situation where it's keep fighting and die, or surrender.

There's 97,000 tanks and guns and bayonets and shit pointed at you. Even though any one of them individually could have kicked Adolf Hitler's ass. So there are times in life when it is prudent to surrender. What each of us needs to do is to look at the evidence in our life, our own experience, what the facts are. Not how we want it to be or wish it was. But how it actually is in our life. Are we powerless? What are the odds *we* are gonna stay sober, and for how long? And what's that sobriety gonna look like, if it lasts at all? And what's the next relapse gonna look like? What does my future look like if I'm really an alcoholic, if the things that this book says are the truth? Stuff to look at.

CD 2, Track 7: Effect Produced; Cannot Differentiate the True from the False

Michael: Okay, we wanna go back to xxviii [in the Fourth Edition of the big-book]. Last paragraph, where it says, men and women drink. "Men and women drink...." Remember, this is a doctor's opinion. "Men and women drink essentially because" they're idiots.

[Laughter]

Michael: Essentially because they're stupid. Essentially because they're bad. Or they had bad childhoods. Or they had low self-esteem. *See, no.* "Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol." Who does that? Both men *and* women. And that's *why* they drink? *That's it?* It's that simple. It's for the effect that the alcohol produces. Is that true or false in your own experience? That blew me away. I never knew that. People would ask me many times over many, many years, why do you drink? And I had a hundred reasons. Got a job, don't got a job. Got a her, don't got a her. Graduated, got kicked out of school. Yeah. I'm broke, I'm not broke. I'm depressed, I'm happy. Didn't make any difference. I always had a *reason* or an excuse or something... an answer. But it was never this. Truth was, I liked it. That's it. So you gotta ask yourself, could it be that simple for you? You like the effect that it produces? See, it's one of those weird things that goes on in the mind of an alcoholic. Alcoholics don't see alcohol as a problem. Alcoholics see alcohol as a solution. Because in my life, all the things that normal people do and experience that make them happy, such as families and children and boats and jobs and paychecks and new cars and furniture and food and music and all that.... See, that makes them happy. But it never made me happy. The only thing that ever took away my shit and allowed me to be happy was booze. The effect that I got from it. That was it. Women never did it. Money never did it. Nothin' ever did it but booze. Just a garden variety, I love to drink, alcohol is my best friend, boozier. No, it's gotta be way more complicated than that, doesn't it? Not according to this, it isn't. So what's *you're* experience? It says, "The sensation," meaning the effect, "is so elusive...." Elusive means you can't quite get a hold of it. You start to look at that, and you go, what-what? You can't get it. "The sensation is so elusive, that while they admit it is so injurious...." Now, if somebody is admitting that the drinking is injurious, they're not in denial, are they? So the problem isn't denial. Even though you may have heard that from counselors and treatment centers. "You're in denial!" No you're not. You wouldn't be here if you were. So throw that out. That's a treatment center idea. Because for years I admitted it was injurious. I wasn't in denial of that. "They cannot after a time differentiate," which means tell the difference between, "the true and the false." The problem here with alcoholics is we

read that, and we make this really quick unconscious calculation: If it is true that I cannot tell the true from the false, that means what I believed to be true is false, and what I think is false is true, and therefore I'm nuts. Hm. So I believed all my life that I could deal with the issues on page 52, and the issues on page 52 are worse than they used to be, and I've learned all this stuff, and they haven't been solved, so what I believed to be true is not true, and if it's not true then it's false. Huh.

Person #2: I'm a bit confused.

Michael: Yeah. And step two says, we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sobriety. Did I make a mistake? Anybody know what the mistake I just made was?

Many: Sanity.

Michael: Yeah. See, I need to be restored to what? A place where I can tell the true from the false? That's some place I need to *get to*? Be *restored to*? So I'd have to accept that I can't tell the true from the false if I need to be restored to sanity. Could that explain why I struggle with things so much? Could that be why with all this effort things don't change. It's normal and it's comfortable to struggle.

Deborah: It's familiar.

Michael: It's a bunch of things, isn't it. But does it work? And could it be that's because we really can't tell the true from the false.

Julie: But what does that mean?

Michael: It means exactly what it says. What's it say in your book? "They cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false." So all of us alcoholics – and this included me in my first year of sobriety – read this, and we immediately tell ourselves, that statement's false.

[Laughter]

Person #2: Well, either that, or you think, when I was drinking I didn't know the difference between what was real and what was false because...

Deborah: Because it was normal.

Michael. Yeah. But I'm sane *now*. I'm not powerless *now*. I've got choices now that I'm not drinking. See, as the old-timers say, if you sober up a horse thief, what you end up with is a sober horse thief. And if you sober up someone who can't tell the true from the false, what do you got? A sober person who can't tell the true from the false. Is there any evidence in Alcoholics Anonymous that it's true that sober people can't tell the true from the false?

Michelle: Yes.

Michael: Ninety-eight percent of the people who come to Alcoholics Anonymous get drunk again. So I'd say there's a lot of evidence that sober people in Alcoholics Anonymous cannot tell the true from the false. There's a lot of evidence that sober people in Alcoholics Anonymous struggle and live on page 52. 'Cause I work with a lot of them. And I used to be one of them. And I can clearly share with you that during the first year of my sobriety in my unrecovered state, having worked the steps at least twice, I still

could not tell the true from the false and did not know that. Step two, to me, said, came to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sobriety. That was what I was concerned with. That's nothing like what the book talks about. That's called *my own program*.

CD 2, Track 8: Cunning, Baffling, Powerful

Michael: So a spiritual experience, finding a spiritual experience in my life, is going to require me to face the facts about my own thinking and my point of view and the state of my mind sober. To come to understand that step one applies to the sober alcoholic, not just to the drinking alcoholic. So many of us in AA, we sit in the rooms and say, yes when I was drinking I was out of control, and yes when I was drinking I did crazy things, and yes when I was drinking page 52 was true, and yes when I was drinking I was powerless. But since I put the plug in the jug, and come to the fellowship, none of those things are true anymore. And that's not what the book says at all. The book is telling us that step one is about the sober person, and that's what's cunning, baffling, and powerful about alcoholism. Let me ask you a question that I ask just about everybody I've ever worked with. When our minds, especially when we're new, newly sober, and our minds are screaming at us that we need another drink – I need to get drunk, and I wish I could drink, and all that stuff – is there anything cunning about that, or baffling? Or isn't that right up front, in your face, it's not sneaky. The big-book doesn't talk about that. It talks about people who are sober, some of them for very long periods of time, who do not want to drink, who have no intention of ever taking another drink, who are trying very hard to be sober people, and who find themselves drunk, and they don't even know why. They don't even know how it started. One of the examples is a guy with 25 years. See, *that's* cunning, *that's* baffling, and *that's* powerful. The obsession that the book talks about, and we're gonna talk more about the obsession tomorrow because the main problem exists in the mind, is cunning, baffling, powerful. The allergy part of it, the part that *we* accept powerlessness about, is not very cunning or baffling. It's certainly powerful, but it's easy to see. The obsession is not so easy to see or understand, and that's the part that *is* cunning and baffling and powerful. And that's where relapse starts for most of us. If you ever judge relapsers, stop doing that. The more you understand alcoholism, the less we want to judge anybody who keeps relapsing.

CD 2, Track 9: A Fatal Illness that Centers in the Mind

Michael: When we start talking about the problems with the mind of the alcoholic, and what the chronic alcoholic mind *is* and is capable of, people's minds close.

Julie: Could you repeat that first part?

Michael: Yeah. When we start talking about the *mind*, and the issue of sanity...

[Laughter]

Michael: ...people's minds close.

[Laughter continues]

Julie: I was talking

Michael: I understand. And you can just sort of notice that in yourself. And one of the ways you notice it is you get pissed.

Josh: Or distracted.

Michael: Yeah, or get distracted, or have something to say, or gotta fart or... something. Those are all indicators, if you're looking, of you're mind closing, because this is not easy to accept. The alcoholic mind is the killer. It's the main problem. You'll find that in the book. This is nothing I'm making up. But it is where relapse starts. No matter how bad it was when we're drinking, if we never pick up another drink, we're never gonna suffer *that* again. If we never pick up another drink. But ninety-eight percent of us *do* suffer that again, because we *do* pick up that drink. And step one is about why we do that and what the solution to that is, why we can't prevent ourselves from picking up that drink. No amount of meetings is going to save anybody's butt. We aren't gonna get *loved* back to health. 62,000 courses of *Kumbaya My Friend* ain't gonna do it. Our friends are just gonna go, whatever happened to Phil-in-the-blank? And you don't want to become Fill-in-the-blank. Like all the other people whose names have filled in the blank over sixty years in Alcoholics Anonymous. Everybody needs to understand, if you're an alcoholic the way I'm an alcoholic, the way the book describes alcoholism, you've got a chronic, fatal, progressive disease going on in you right now. Serious stuff. This isn't any different than finding out you've got AIDS or multiple sclerosis or some form of terminal cancer. No difference. This is really serious.

CD 2, Track 10: Doctor's Opinion, Cycle of Drinking

Michael: Okay, back to the book. It says, "To them, their alcoholic life seems normal." See, this all seems normal to us. We just accept it as the way things are. And kind of assume that everybody else is dealing with the same stuff in the same way. And it's not true at all. "They are..." And these are three words you ought to look up in your dictionary and ask yourself if they're going on a lot. Number one is *restless*, number two is *irritable*, and number three, *discontented*. "They," meaning chronic alcoholics, "are restless, irritable, and discontented unless they can again experience the sense of ease of comfort..." What's that? The effect he talked about, "which comes," when? Seven days after you take a drink? "*At once...* by taking a few drinks," and these are, "drinks which they see others taking with impunity." Who are those others? Normal people who can drink and be okay with drinking. They can even go out and get drunk occasionally if they want to, but they don't seem to get DUI's and their lives don't fall apart, and they don't have screaming matches, and their mind isn't so fucked up. All that kind of crap. And we see other people doing that, they're controlling and enjoying what's going on. And it just baffles the shit out of us, and we wonder why we can't do that, but every time we do that, the following happens: It says, "After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do," what happens? You trigger the allergy we had talked about. The phenomenon of craving develops – the more you drink, the more you want, "and they pass through the well-known stages of a spree." The well-known stages of a spree, there are three of them. The first one is the illusion of control. I've got this under control, this is no big deal. The second one is a progressive loss of control. It starts getting a little worse. And the third one is... *fucked*

up. Out of control. So just look at your own experience of what this paragraph is telling you. And it says, “emerging remorseful.” Remorse means a tortuous sense of guilt for ones actions. Is remorse an old com-padre of yours? It certainly was of mine. A lot of beating yourself up? So we come out of it, we're fully remorseful, and what do we do? We swear off. We say a firm resolution not to do it again. Ain't never gonna do this again. And then what happens? “This is repeated,” over and over and over. So, it does pass, doesn't it, but it comes back.

Person #2: This too shall return!

[Laughter]

Michael: See, it does pass, but it does return, it does come back. It's repeated over and over again. So you look at your experience and you go, did they just describe me in that paragraph? Am I restless, irritable, and discontented? If I take a drink, will an allergy trigger? The more I drink, the more I want. So I might be able to control it for a day or two, or a week or two, or even a month or two. But will it get worse? And what will be the end of that? Will there be a progressive loss of control? Will I get totally out of control? Will I end up arrested or in a treatment center, or without family or a husband or a wife or kids or whatever, if this happens to me again? If I do this again, can I see that I'm gonna go through all this shit, and I'm gonna come out of it, and I'm not gonna be happy about it? How many times have I sworn off, and how many times have I started again? So, “This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change, there is very little hope of his recovery.” What does that mean? You're gonna do it again. No matter how bad it's been in your life up to this point, it's gonna get worse. And then it's gonna get worse than that. Whatever you've been through up to this point, you may have called a bottom, but it ain't the bottom. There's more bottom. And then if you survive that, there's gonna be more bottom. And then if you survive that, there'll be *more bottom*.

Julie: So, no matter how spiritual you are, or, without a psychic change?

Michael: In an unrecovered state, this is what you have to look forward to. See, if this is your past, this is also your future.

Deborah: So then how do you gauge your recovery? Your recovered state?

Michael: There ain't a gauge, there's an experience. As you work the steps, if you have any kind of genuine spiritual experience, the obsession that drives this cycle we just read will be removed, and you'll know it.

Julie: It seems so *out there*. This spiritual experience.

Michael: No, it's *in there*, it's not *out there*.

Person #2: But then doesn't this... that's how we're so separate from people who actually have cancer and stuff like that, because they can't just sit down and do the steps and have that spiritual awakening.

Michael: Well...

Person #2: They can have a surrender, though. And they do.

Michael: They can and do. Many people who have had serious diseases such as terminal cancer and AIDS and things have said it's been the best thing that ever happened to them. It took them to a spiritual experience. My sponsor, who used to do a bunch of work with a bunch of different people, told me back when AIDS was first coming on that the only thing back then that ever produced any real results in AIDS patients was the twelve steps. And he had personally seen that happen a few times. And I've had experience with a couple of people having *miraculous*, really *miraculous*, recoveries from things like breast cancer, stuff like that. So I don't discount this stuff, or *God*, as a solution to any kind of problem, but I can't *promise* that to people. But I do tell them, if nothing else, it will allow them to live in a state of acceptance, which will make everything much easier for them.

CD 2, Track 11: Doctor's Opinion, Cycle of Everything

Michael: We were reading page 151. We went back and went through it again, and I changed some words. And we could see exactly the same thing happening sober as they are describing happening drunk. We're gonna do that again with this same paragraph. And I want you to just look at your own experience. "Men and women go to meetings essentially because they like the effect produced by meetings. The sensation is so elusive, that while they admit they ain't getting anywhere, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, this alcoholic recovery thing seems normal, and they are restless, irritable, and discontent unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by doubling up on the meetings, calling their sponsor – because they see other people doing this. So after they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, the phenomenon of craving develops, and they pass through the well-known stages of ninety meetings in ninety days. And they emerge remorseful, with a firm resolution to actually work the steps or call their sponsor or read their big-book or some shit like that, they're gonna go to a retreat. And this is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change, there is very little hope of his or her recover." Now, that's kind of funny, but it's also true, but the fundamental point is that's exactly the same cycle as the cycle of drinking. So the meetings are being used as not to fill a void of God but to fill a void of alcohol. Okay?

Person #3: But the idea is not to take it as not go to meetings, but to reach a higher level to start being able to help others.

Michael: See, the point that we're trying to make here is: Until this obsession driving this cycle is removed from you, you're gonna repeat this cycle in everything you do. I'm gonna prove it to you. Back to the beginning of the paragraph. "Men and women do sex and relationships essentially because they like the effect of doing sex and relationships. The sensation is so elusive that while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, this alcoholic sex and relationship thing seems normal. And they are restless, irritable, and discontent unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by finding Mr. Right, or Ms. Right, and getting laid, and doing whatever you're doing. They see other people doing it, and it looks like it's

working. After they have succumbed to the desire again as so many do, and the phenomenon of an affair or whatever develops, they pass through the well-known stages of those relationships, emerging remorseful with a firm resolution not to do this again, and this is repeated over and over. And unless the person in this cycle can experience an entire psychic change, there is very little hope of his recovery.” Okay, so, “Men and women *shop* essentially because they like effect produced by shopping.” “Men and women *work* essentially because they like the effect produced by workoholicism.” “Men and women *eat* essentially because they like the effect produced by eating.” “Men and women *jog* and run and do exercise essentially because they like the effect produced....” See? It's the same cycle. Everything is being done by the cycle. There's no choice in any of this. This is an unmanageable life. But it seems normal to us, and we never question it. But if you look at your own experience, do you see that going on in your life. What that tells you, if you're really looking, if the original cycle that's described here is about drinking, and you keep trying to fill the void of the drinking with these other things, and you keep emerging remorseful, and you keep switching stuff – keep plugging something new into that cycle trying to fill that void – and you keep ending up remorseful and full of pain and living on page 52, where's that cycle going to take you?

Many: Back to drinking.

Michael: Back to drinking. Back where you started.

Julie: This too will return.

Deborah: So you have to admit you're powerless over relationships.

Michael: Everything. What I'm telling you is, step one is right. Your life is unmanageable, and you don't know it.

CD 2, Track 12: The King of Obsessions

Josh: Is the obsession that you have to do something to change yourself or to be different, to make yourself feel okay? I mean, can you generalize the obsession?

Michael: I don't need to generalize it. Turn your book to page 30. It's the first page of More About Alcoholism. And just start reading down until they tell you what the obsession is.

Josh: That he will control and enjoy his drinking.

Michael: Mhm. The *great* obsession. Not *the only* obsession. The great, the king of obsessions. The obsession that controls all other obsessions. The one underneath it all. And *we* think that because we have a desire to stop drinking, that couldn't be true. But two things can be true at exactly the same time. You can have, as the book says, the most powerful desire to stop drinking. And that sentence can be true in you at exactly the same time.

Josh: That's what I mean when I said I never would have bought into this if I hadn't picked up, because I thought all this other stuff that was going on had nothing to do with my alcoholism. And then despite my seeming desire, I was drinking. It took me by surprise.

Person #2: Well, even if the desire to drink and use has been lifted, or you've been separated from alcohol and drugs for a while, that does not mean the obsession has been lifted. And you're still in the cycle of the spree. And you're still in that very sometimes subconscious desire to control and enjoy alcohol again, and we may not even be aware of it.

Michael: Probably *aren't* aware of it.

Person #2: And that's baffling to me.

Deborah: Or it could be like you were saying – money, property, or prestige – the great obsession to control those things around us.

Michael: Well, the belief in those is all coming from the great obsession, because those things – as they peter out and do not solve the problem of being permanently restless, irritable, and discontent – will take you always back to the bottle. If it's *always* going back to the bottle, then that *must* be the *great* obsession. If all these other obsessions can be left behind in favor of going back to the bottle, whether you want to or not, that will tell you something about the power of the *great* obsession.

CD 2, Track 13: Who's Running Your Life?

Michael: See, I lost everything except my pride and booze as I went down the doom curve. So when the girlfriend said, "I'm out of here," I said, "Okay." And when the boss said, "You're fired," I said, "Okay." And when the bank said, "Your credit's no good, and we've closed out your account, and we don't want your business," I said, "Okay." And when my wife left, I said, "Okay." And as my health left me, I went, "Okay." And as my ability to get a job, earn any money, or do anything at all worthwhile in life left me, I went, "Okay." It was the most powerful thing in my life. I was willing to lose everything. See, all these other things I thought I had issues with were kind of wiped out of me by the time I hit AA. I thought they were vitally important, but the fact was when push came to shove, it was booze. And everything except my pride and the booze was gone. Everything. And I'm talking not just outside, but inside. How 'bout things like honesty, integrity, love, usefulness, all that. Happiness. See, all that, long gone. The big obsession for me, very clearly, booze. That was it. So I get sober, and I can try all this other stuff, but it never solved the problem when I was actively drinking, and it didn't solve the problem when I was actively sober either. As far as I'm concerned, it's just my own experience and my own opinion of what I see going on in other people in AA who are still being run by the obsession is that this incessant plugging in of things that goes on with the obsession – in going around in a circle with the relationships and the jobs and all this other stuff – it's nothing more than the *struggle* to be normal. You're not acceptive of it. That we are bodily and mentally different. We just can't accept our alcoholism at its root. Unless and until we do accept our alcoholism, we're going to continue doing this; whatever you do, it's gonna go in a circle. If you just look at your experience, you'll see it. You'll see this thing. You'll see the restless, irritable, and discontent. Turning up the stereo: sense of ease and comfort. Getting laid. Getting in a fight. All kinds of stuff. Go through the sprees. I'll never do it again. Doing it again. Struggling, fighting. And thinking that somehow this is normal and that you have a choice and you ought to be a better person. It's amazing. This is repeated over and over unless this person can experience an entire

psychic change. That's step twelve: having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps. There is very little hope of his or her recovery. That's what the alcoholic faces. It's the certain relapse and the certain misery and death that is going to occur as a result of that, and a spiritual experience. I've asked many sponsees over many years, if God isn't running your life, if you can't turn your will and your life over to God, then who's running your life? What do you think?

Someone: Alcoholism.

Michael: Who said that? That's right. You're not running your life. This is not a choice between God's will and your will. There is no choice between God's will and your will. This is a choice between God's will and this obsession. God either is or He isn't. Choose.

CD 2, Track 14: Closing Prayer

God, I ask that you be with me to guide and direct me as I seek your truth. Father, please set aside within me that which would block me from the truth. Lay aside my prejudices about what I think I know about this process, this exercise, and my spiritual condition. Remove my fears about what I may find out about myself, Lord, and help me realize your truth.

[For homework, each person read Dr. Tiebout's paper *Surrender versus Compliance*]

CD 3, Track 1: Bonding with Honest Sharing

Michael: Michelle last night at dinner was mentioning to me that she noticed that as we go through this after one day, there seemed to be a kind of a bond that was happening among the people who were attending. Anybody else notice that or feel that and see that something like that is going on? It's a version of what happens to men and women in a war who go through battles. A kind of bonding happens as a result of shared experience. It's what the big-book calls the Fellowship of the Spirit. People joining shoulder-to-shoulder on a common journey. And when we go through things with other people, that starts to happen, and it is a good and powerful thing. Part of the reason that bonding experience happens is because we share with each other. See, if we did this where I was the only person who blabbed all day long and you didn't participate, then that *thing*, that magic thing, wouldn't have happened. So this morning we're going to go back into that for a while. And I don't care how long the *while* is, but I asked everybody to ask that Dr. Tiebout paper last night. And I know that some of you did, I hope that everybody did. What we want to do now is – I would like you all to share your experience of having read that. What do you see about yourself having read that? See, anything that is true in your own experience that you can share with your group, that could help somebody else. One of the things our big-book talks about is that we share our experience, strength, and hope. That's where the bond comes from. The bond does not come from. The bond does not come from advice, opinion, analysis, what I think about anything. Who cares what I think about anything? But my experience, if I'll share that in a group, can

produce something. It can help somebody else. You can notice that if you just look at your experience of going to AA meetings. And some of our AA meetings are nothing more than people – they call it sharing, but it's just uninventoried crap that's being spoken. And right in the middle of all the uninventoried crap and opinions, somebody does something honest. Quite often, it's a newcomer. A newcomer will be sitting there honest. And the room will quiet down, and everyone will go like *this*. Something happens when the honesty is there. Have you ever had that experience? What if all meetings were like that? What if everybody was sharing that way? Just their experience. Whatever the truth is for them *today*. And it was safe for them to do that. “How are you today?” “I'm all fucked-up. That's where I am *today*. Today, right now, I'm angry as hell. Don't know why. Full of fear. Don't know why.” What if we just shared the truth of what was going on in us? Do you think things might be a little different, and you might have a totally different experience at meetings? So, what we need now is a volunteer. Who'd like to share based on what they read in the homework?

Person #2: I'll share.

Michael: Great. It starts.

CD 3, Track 2: First Share

Person #2: You know, I can't really depth about the whole reading. I did read it, and I read it twice, but I needed to read it a third time just for me to let it come into me. I understand what it's discussing. Unfortunately I was in a state of a lot of defiance last night, and I had a lot of anger issues that I was dealing with. And I just am angry, and that hasn't happened to me for a long time. I've had like this whole thing of bliss going on for the last week or so. Feeling like everything's cool. But now I'm just mad. So that's what's going on with me. And I don't think it was this paper that made me mad, I just think it's the defiant individual. It's my personality as an alcoholic. I guess that's all I can say. Right now that's all I know.

Michael: Dynamite. Thanks.

CD 3, Track 3: Fred Shares

Fred: What I see is, I see the unconscious compliance going on. I see that dual nature of – on the surface compliance, and behind-the-scenes unwillingness. And what I want to do is, I want to make surrender happen. That's where I really am confronting the hopelessness of my situation, because I cannot make this essential element necessary for my recovery to begin happen of my own will. I feel that if I don't make it happen, I'm gonna die. That's the paradox of where I am right now in my recovery. I'm damned if I do, I'm damned if I don't. There's nothing I *can* do. It perplexes me continually. I read this and I go, where's the paragraph that tells me how I do it?

[Laughter]

Fred: It's not there. The answer is that I can't do it. I've shared with you and Michelle and probably a

couple other people in this meeting: There's a guy in the rooms that shares exactly where I am at now in his past. And achieved this surrender that works. I can tell he's one of those people that I've said I can sense the recovery. I know that the process works because I can tell it's genuine. When he shares, it's real. And I've gone up to him after a meeting and said, how did it happen? And he said, "Well, everybody surrenders. Some of us have to get a life-threatening disease and die for it to happen, but we all surrender." And me and my uniqueness says, I'm the one that's gonna get the life-threatening disease or die to achieve surrender, 'cause that's the way it is, it's preordained. The answer is that I can't make it happen. It's only through the willingness, the honesty, and the open mind that I can be available for it to happen. I worry that that's not there. It's me – it's fear. I'm a fear-based individual. So that's what I was thinking as I was reading this paper. Going back to that. Knowing that that's how it will happen for me. And I don't always believe that. I believe that the surrender will happen if I'm available for it. But I just have to stop fighting, stop *trying*. As you say, there's no trying, there's doing. That's it.

CD 3, Track 4: Deborah Shares

Deborah: My name is Deborah, and I am definitely an alcoholic. The first thing that went through my head was that the staple was much too close to the words.

[Laughter]

Deborah: And as soon as I get home with enough time, I'm gonna take the staple out, arrange the paper so there's no extra edge over here so that I can read all the words so I don't have to...

[Laughter continues]

Deborah: I swear to God, that's just how my head is. I had to move the paper over a couple times like *this*, and it bothered the fuck out of me, so.

Josh: Bothered me too, I did it.

[Laughter continues]

Deborah: It's okay though.

Michael: That's great.

Deborah: That's what was first through my head. And I don't know if I'm even over that yet, but it'll be okay. And it's so where my head is that... even when I'm trying to really to concentrate on this thing, every time I turn the paper over and I see another time when I'm having to do this, I'll have to refocus as to what I'm doing. But anyway, besides all that... and then I wonder, "Am I really an alcoholic?" Um, the thing that I guess resonated with me more than anything else was this Milquetoasts thing, because that's where I have been. So many times in this program, I was like, okay so if I totally accept everything then am I still gonna be Deborah? Am I gonna be Deborah, or am I gonna be some AA form of robot? I don't want to be one of the people that when you look into their eyes, you see China. I want to actually be *me* still behind my eyes. And I don't want to have that gaze. I think of the gaze as somebody that has lost all the ability to have their own self and identity. So that's where surrender has gotten mixed up in my

head that if I surrender then I'm gonna be in the airport wearing red and white and handing out fliers. So that's one thing. And then the compliance and surrender thing is like – there was a lot of head nodding going on, because for some reason I have to define where the line is with all sorts of stuff. So the difference between compliance versus surrender and partial surrender definitely made sense to me, and it made me question where I am. I guess the answer that I came up with was that I am different parts of this at different times. Hopefully I can get to a place where it can be okay with me to surrender completely without fear of losing Deborah. I think that through working with Michelle and doing the steps, I will feel at a place where I can be okay with knowing that I can fully surrender, and that it will be okay, and that I don't have to be afraid to do that. I think that's it, if that made any sense.

Michael: Cool. Thank you.

CD 3, Track 5: Michelle #1 Shares

Michelle: Okay, I'll share. This to me is a treasure chest of understanding me, understanding alcoholics. I'm naturally drawn to the psychological study of the psyche, the study of emotions. I've always been into that. My mom's a therapist, my sister's a therapist. I've always had that interest about what drives the human psyche, but I have to say something about surrender out of my experience, and that is that I have never surrendered. I can't surrender. I don't have the power. And what I did was comply. My ego was in operation in ever working with a sponsor. I tried to be a good AA girl. And I tried to do my homework. And I tried to do what was asked of me. And I tried to act interested. Head-nodding. And inside was a very different story. Inside was: I'm never gonna get this. And why would I want to? And fuck this. I relate to being angry across the board. I know what that is. That is the natural state of me in my untreated alcoholism. Terror, rage, confusion. But what happened to me was long term sobriety. And because I had longer and longer time without being able to treat my alcoholism with alcohol, I got really sick, and then life had its way with me. And what happened to me is I *got* surrendered. I didn't do it. It happened *to me*. With the help of Michael, with certainly with the help of the total unmanageability of my life inside and out. What also happened was exhaustion. It played a part in my surrender, I'm sure of it. What Michael told me when I met me... I had these deep dark, circles under my eyes, and I was exhausted from life as a sober, dry alcoholic. I had to cop to how angry I was for me to have my surrender experience. I was driving around in my car with Fred one day. He didn't even know this was happening. I started hitting the steering wheel. You know when you feel cornered and there's no way out – well, when you are cornered and there's no way out.

[Laughter]

Michelle: It's not a feeling, it's a fact. I got there driving down the tracks on Leucadia Boulevard and Vulcan, and I just started hitting the steering wheel. “I don't want to fuckin' be an alcoholic.” It was out of the blue. It just happened. From that moment to really formally taking my first steps, to the time I started working with Michael, was about six or seven months. And the solution that was presented to me was presented in a way that was like, I would come down to Michael's house, and I would go, “Blah-blah-blah-blah.” And he would just sit there in the way he does.

[Laughter]

Michelle: Staring. Lock and load. His eyes are like laser beams, right? Those who work with him know what I'm talking about. Locked and loaded.

Josh: His silence is his greatest weapon.

Michelle: His silence is his greatest weapon. And his most deadly weapon.

[Cell phone rings]

Michelle: And I was – okay, everybody's reaching for their cell phones, so it's only one, I'm sure.

Josh: 'Cause we're all realizing they're on.

Michael: Good, everybody reach, everybody hit the snooze button.

Michelle: Everybody hit the snooze button, that's right. So, I felt that I was getting herded into a tunnel of recovery, 'cause I was out *here*, and I started working with Michael, and I started getting squeezed into this path of surrender. It was so uncomfortable, and I didn't know... I was like, "What are we doing?" And those of you who work with *me* know this, because I do the same thing. It's like, "What are we doing?! Give me an assignment! Give me something to do! What are we doing?!" And it happens with every person I work with. I'm just waiting for it to come out. The struggle that I experienced with that – like Michael's unwillingness to give me the answers, his unwillingness to let me depend on him, his unwillingness to... I mean, he would let me say whatever, obviously he wasn't trying to stop me from saying anything, but it was that for the first time ever I took time to sit with someone who had direction, who has a Director, who's very direct. It got me up against my self. So I couldn't project my shit onto him. It wasn't gonna happen. I tried, but it wasn't gonna happen. Because my frustration was with my unmanageability. Living on page 52 was kicking my ass. I was so scared and then I was somehow able to have that awareness of being cornered, not wanting to be cornered, and nothing I can do about it. Like what he talks about here. There's something in here he says, and then I'll shut up. It's on page three. A step beyond recognition. He says, "After eight years of analysis with four therapists of different schools, he began to get some inkling of acceptance as a state of mind which he sadly lacked. Finally in a burst of awareness, he remarked, 'I know all the reasons but I don't know how to be reasonable.'" And then he says, "His logical mind could perceive and believe all the factors underlying his difficulties, but he remained cantankerous and unreasonable as far as his feeling life was concerned. In his head or conscious mind, he could accept the explanations, but deep inside, where the heart or the unconscious operates, there was no feeling of acceptance." And that was the thing that was the chasm. You know, people say, "Between the head and the heart is the longest journey." That was the chasm that I was up against over and over again. I always had this voice that told me I was full of shit. It was always there. And it was this whispering. "You're full of shit. Michelle, you're full of shit. You can't tell the truth." And it was always there. And it was after this surrendered experience that that voice went away, and I starting to feel, I was able to start speaking the truth and telling it to myself. And in step six and seven, I just went through yet another surrender experience where I was cornered again. I was still seeing character defects in operation in such a way that I wasn't – just like what Deborah talked about – I wasn't really sure I

wanted to be rid of them. And if I wanted to be rid of them, could God really do that? And if God could do it, what was it gonna mean for me? Oh, and here I am in fear again. And it's just this squirrel cage of fear. And it's the place that we all get to before surrender. It's an awful, awful place. It is no fun for anybody, per-surrender. And that's one thing I did want to share out of my own experience is that. If you're having these uncomfortable feelings, and you don't know what they are, and you don't really know what it's all about, but you're on this path... Stay awake. Try to keep your eyes open, because there are things happening. And you may not see right around the corner. You usually can't see what's right around the corner. Surrender means I don't know what the outcome is. And surrender means I'm listening, and I'm taking direction, and I'm gonna have a modicum of faith that because I see it in my sponsor it can happen for me. And I keep checking with him, like, "Is this really gonna happen for me? Can I be free like that? Can I really be free? Can I really not care about all of these other material things? Can I really be free like you?" 'Cause I want what Michael has when I grow up. So, he's helping me grow up, and it's the best thing ever. I have a sense of peace in my gut that I've never had in my whole life – forty-six years, I've never had it until this year. So thanks for listening to me.

CD 3, Track 6: Josh Shares

Josh: I'll share. When I first read this – Michael asked me to read this a while ago – there were so many things in it that struck me as true about me. They've really kind of eaten my lunch. It was like I was exposed. All of my tap dancing bullshit was there for everyone to see. I realized that I was probably fooling a lot fewer people than I thought. Probably no one. Some of the things that really stuck out to me was this: that the recognition in the compliance stuff was really about trying to fit in. But I didn't have any of the belief that comes in step two, that if I really let go, I wasn't gonna fall. My whole life was one let down after another. That's how I viewed the world. So for me to trust, magically somehow, that I was gonna be okay if I really let go was really beyond my capability. What Fred said is true. I can't do this. I have been spiritually seeking for the extent of my nine years of my recovery trying to find God, this *it* thing. The problem was that I was trying to take *me* there, this self-centered ego, to this new pace, because *I* was what I was relying on. It's the only thing that had always been there despite the fact that my life was miserable. So I had been doing all of this meditation toward the end of my last sobriety, and I began becoming aware of what Fred was talking about. They talk in a lot of Eastern stuff about the Big Death and the Little Death, and the Big Death is really the death of the ego, and that the Little Death is the death of the body. For me, all of this stuff was very abstract; it was a concept. And I thought, okay, *I* have to achieve this Big Death, whatever the fuck that means. Right, and I mean, that sounds ridiculous. So obviously that didn't happen, and I was in full relapse. And I was high one night at a friend's house, and we were watching *Pulp Fiction*. And I mean, I have seen this movie a hundred times. I love it, it's a great movie. And I was watching the first scene where Sam Jackson is about to kill the guy, right? Everybody's seen *Pulp Fiction*? It's dark, but it's funny. It's meant to be comedic. And he's saying this thing out of this Bible. He's reading this quote out of the Bible, and he's aiming this gun at this kid, and the kid is sitting there squirming in his chair. He's about to die. And I'm watching this, I'm high out of my mind, and I realize: This is going to happen. This is my life. That. I got pissed off in a way that I

can't even describe. It was like, fuck you, this isn't fair. There's no escape. It's either now or someday. And that's my impression of God: standing there with a gun in my face. Because it's out of my control. I can't do anything about it. I'm powerless over it. The only power that I have is to take myself out. And what kind of power is that? I can't choose for this inevitability not to happen. It was like, fuck you, that's not fair. And *this* is surrender? This is what you've given me? And so I spent the next year and a half being out of my head, and then miraculously was not. I reached a point where I was praying to this God I was furious at that I didn't believe in anymore while I was drinking, every day, trying to force God to give me sobriety. I had an experience where I was talking to a friend in the program, and I was saying I realize I'm an alcoholic. I *recognize* that I'm an alcoholic, but I can't stop. And he said, "Are you praying?" And I said I'm praying everyday. And I realized it was hopeless. I realized I'm gonna die out here. And it was soon after that that I came back in. So it had nothing to do with me. I realize that. I sat for the next couple of years in here pissed off about the facts of life. And I would listen to people in AA talk about faith and all this stuff. And I was just a really angry fucking guy pretending I was spiritual, because I had all this spiritual knowledge. Because I couldn't resolve the truth that *Josh*, as I saw him, was not going to get any of these rewards. That just pissed me off. It just seemed pointless and unfair. So when you were talking about it not making any sense, you can't explain what to do here. There is nothing to do. There's just everything to *not* do, and to let go of. Everything. Letting go of even the notion of doing anything. I can't do anything. I'm fucked. And that's the truth. And it's not a pretty truth. It's not something that made me feel warm and fuzzy. It made me feel angry. What changed for me was, Michael asked me to consider why I believed God would not help me. And that was my truth. I believed that if I let go, there wouldn't be anybody there. That there would be nothing there. Despite the fact that I had all this knowledge. I had read everything. I had done everything, I had tried everything, I could talk for hours about different spiritual concepts. At my core, I had no belief that there was anything there. What I came to realize was that it was really me. I was holding on. I wouldn't even risk letting go to see if God would be there. I would not even take that risk. And that's why page 52 is so important, because it's about being convinced that it's not gonna get any better. If I keep living like I'm living, I'm just gonna keep going through this suffering. This is my experience. The notion of continuing like that, at a certain point, became more terrifying than whatever would happen if I just let go. But I couldn't do it. I had to pray for the willingness to do it. I had to pray for the honesty and the open-mindedness. In the same way that sobriety was somehow miraculously granted, so did the surrender. So it doesn't make sense. It's not something that is logical, at least not in my experience. It just kind of was given. Even talking about it now, I feel chills. That place where I was was as painful as it has ever gotten for me. Knowing there was no hope. But, you know, I'm feeling graced. Thanks.

CD 3, Track 7: Andrea Shares

Andrea: I read this and I don't completely get it. My experience of reading it was: this might be what's going on with me. It might explain – I can't even put words together. I am completely baffled. I've tried to make sense of it. And I can't. I'm at a place where, I guess it's suicidal, but I'm not consciously thinking – I did have a thought the other day that if I ran into the back of the truck, or just don't want to

wake up. I haven't always felt that way. I've been going to meetings for nine years. I don't know if that was just because of temporary illusions of control and distraction. So I don't know anything. I read it, and I didn't want to. I just wanted to stay in bed and not wake up, so that was my experience of reading that.

CD 3, Track 8: Ellen Shares

Ellen: I just caught the end of what she was saying. I really relate to that a lot actually. To think what I realized in reading this... I read it one time before, but I don't think I soaked it in. In reading it last night, I realized that so much of my life is compliance and just trying to be good or to cleanse myself in some way of when I was bad. I was reading it, and I just found my head looking for the solutions. Where is my ABC? This is how we get through this. 'Cause I like to know what's going to happen, and I like to know how I'm in control of it, and I get really afraid, afraid as I am of death, of giving everything over to God and stepping back and saying, "Okay, fine." I see that as like, what we were talking about yesterday about the dark side of the moon, that's totally how I view that. I have this terror that comes up when I think about doing that. Or I see myself trying to get through life like that. Like I said yesterday, I also have that part of me that's like, "Well, no, 'cause I'm gonna do XYZ, and then I'm gonna be okay." And then I have that part of me that's like, "You know what, I'm tired of this pain. I just don't want to be an alcoholic anymore. I'm just done."

[Laughter]

Ellen: And I just get mad, because I see my pattern in my life sober and not sober of – I say I'm going left, and I go right. And then I go right, and I say, Oh crap, I should have gone left. I cannot make a decision and have it be something that I'm okay with, ever. I can't even think of one thing that I've done and followed through with and been okay. Even getting sober, I had this thought the other night where I really wish that I could go and get drunk and have that be something I could do. And then I tried to tell myself, well maybe I can. Then I was like, no, I can't. But then reading that last night, no, that's just complying. 'Cause I'm not supposed to drink, 'cause I'm in AA, and I have blah-blah-blah time, and yada-yada-yada. Like I was saying outside, even coming here this weekend, this whole week I was like, shit. I have to go and sit in this freaking house all weekend. And then yesterday I felt touched, and I felt that bond so much, and it made me feel so vulnerable, and I don't like to be vulnerable. And I still vulnerable. I woke up and I feel vulnerable. Then there's this part of me that's like, You know that's gonna go away, right? You know you're gonna be all alone again. All that warm, fuzzy feeling that you have from sitting in that room is gonna be gone. Then you'll die – that was the thought that just comes up when I'm by myself. I, too, think that I'm going to be the one that gets the deadly disease and that will be how I surrender once I'm sickened, pale, and about to die, I'll be, Oh yeah!

[Laughter]

Ellen: I got really afraid that I'm not gonna get the opportunity to live freely ever, because I'm just so fucked up in the head. I can't stop it. It feels like I make these decisions that are not so hot, and I don't have the lesson plan of how I'm going to make this stop. And I really need that. This makes me feel

completely out of control, not knowing how to do it. I don't like that feeling, so I try to control things in other ways, which is crazy.

Someone: This, too, shall return.

[Laughter]

Ellen: That's how I felt reading it. And then that thing about complying, it's a blockage – freaking fantastic. 'Cause I don't know anything other than compliance.

CD 3, Track 9: Sigrid Shares

Sigrid: My name is Sigrid, I'm an alcoholic

All: Hi, Sigrid.

Sigrid: Well, I have to be very honest, I didn't do a very good job of reading this, because it was midnight and I was exhausted. But I have to say, the words I got out of it last night were compliance, surrender, partial, alcoholic.... But after listening to some of you today, I haven't reached that point where I'm worried about dying or worried about not getting it, obviously because I'm so new. I'm still floating around in everything. I still feel really good, and I feel really good that last night we had a great time, because I didn't go have to go take a nap. It was kind of like a maiden voyage last night to have these people over. So far, I feel pretty successful. From listening to you all, I feel like I should wait for the other shoe to drop. I didn't read very much, but, I guess that's all. I'm just happy that I'm here. I'm glad that I was able to come to this and get to know all of you. Because I sort of feel like then – it makes me feel a little more like I belong. And I'm not on the outside looking in, looking through the window, rubbing the – what do you call it when it snows, what's it called?

Michael: The frost.

Sigrid: – the frost out the window to look in to see where everybody is, and they're all getting it, and I'm outside looking in thinking, I need some of that. And now I feel like I'm standing in the doorway, and I'm getting it a little bit. But I don't want to go all the way into the room, because I don't like what I see in there.

[Laughter]

Sigrid: I'm happy! Leave me alone!

Michael: You're not baffled. You might want to hang onto that.

Sigrid: So that's it.

CD 3, Track 10: Michelle #2 Shares

Michelle: I left here yesterday, and I was really angry. I was mad at God for making me an alcoholic.

Yeah, that's really it. It was good, because I could turn my phone off and work on that fourth step. It's really getting down in there about all this shit. It [inaudible] about being an alcoholic, and then all these other resentments. That's my fourth step, that's not the topic. I'm really feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable. Just very vulnerable. I'm really happy that this was a two day thing, so I just don't leave with an open wound or something.

[Laughter]

Michelle: I mean, I'm sorry, but that's really what I feel like. So. Yeah. I'm really scared. I wish I wasn't an alcoholic sometimes. A lot [inaudible]. I was really angry yesterday, and I just want to be able to be in relationships and be... I don't know. I'm really spun, too. And I really want to come here and say, Hell yeah, it was great. I think last night when I saw you guys [inaudible], I was like, Hey, what's up, you know. And really, I'm like vulnerable as *fuck*. In all this stuff. And I feel like I have surrendered when I came in here, but now, in my second year, I feel like I could drink really soon. I just feel like that my recovery isn't first. I'm just kind of saying things to say things right now. I just really feel vulnerable. So. That's the thing about it, if I look around, I am in a safe place. So I'm grateful for that. Thank you.

CD 3, Track 11: Julie Shares

Julie: I'm Julie, I'm an alcoholic.

All: Hi, Julie.

Julie: And I didn't do my homework.

[Laughter]

Julie: I tried to read it really fast this morning, but a cup and a half of coffee in me, and like I *zju-zju-zju-zju*. You know, I only drink one cup of coffee a day, and when I have the extra cup, I'm like a tweaker. So I can relate to a lot of what people are saying. Yesterday morning, I was kind of going through some shit in my life, so when I came here yesterday morning, I was full of fear, and I haven't been full of fear like that in so long. Even when I was just getting sober, I covered it up with ego and with anger. My anger is great. I love my anger. It got me sober. It kept me sober. It motivates me to fucking clean my house.

[Laughter]

Julie: It works. It works for me. And sometimes it doesn't work. I think I was able to feel like a vulnerable... and feel my fear, and recognize that I'm in fear, and not just get pissed off and try and not feel the fear and insecurity of like, Oh my god, what if this happens? Oh my god, going to the worst case scenario. Dramatic. Blah-blah. Then reading 52 and this will return and like, fuck, great, there's some hope for me. I feel like my sobriety has been thinking about these fucking flies that are pissing me off. They keep flying through here and I just want to jump up and *attack them*. So at my house, I don't have a fly swatter, and I go around after them with a dish towel, whacking at thing, and knocking shit off the counter, and knocking plants over, and breaking stuff, and... miss the flies. So then if I kill them, then

my house is destroyed, and then I'm mad about that. So my solution to the whole situation is to pick up the candle and sweep up the dirt from the knocked over plant and throw away the broken cup. And then I go outside, and more fucking flies come in, and this returns. You know? And it's like, okay, yeah, that's not a solution. That's not the way to handle... that's pretty much my sobriety I think. Creating this stuff, being pissed off about it, cleaning it up, saying, "I'm in the solution." And then it's like, Do it again. And not get to the real source of finding a fly swatter and really taking care of business. I feel like coming here and looking at the powerlessness and the surrender aspect of what needs to happen not just mentally but unconsciously and deep down... it's scary. I feel like I can either make a choice right now to start going and working a good program, or continue with the dish towel. The good program is what I want, but then that's scary, because then you gotta feel shit and go through shit. And I see people that have a good program and work a good program, and I want what they have, but then they go through shit, and I'm like, *whoa*. I don't know. It's hard. The path, the most direct path from point A to point B is like *zhoop*, but I like to go *whoowhoowhoow*, and take the longest loop-d-loops, detracting, cruising, superficial way and prolong it, and just get through stuff with anger and *get-er-done* rather than to feel it and be totally honest inside and be present to it. I think that's all I have to say.

CD 3, Track 12: An Eleventh Shares

Person #4: It's almost like I don't really feel like I need to... I mean, I need to share, I suppose. But I really related to almost everything everybody in here said starting with Fred and going from there. I characterize God as something that's gonna crush me like a bug someday. Which is good timing with the fly thing. That's really how I think of it. You know, he loves me, but someday, he's just gonna....

[Laughter]

Person #4: The gun thing, I really related to that. The compliance thing... when I read it, it was like, okay tell me something I don't know.

[Laughter]

Person #4: It was very well elucidated for me. And I go, Oh, yeah. And the idea of it being a barrier to surrender, I had never put it like that before, and I can see that. It's so deep in me, though, that it's... I'm just really thinking about the never-give-up stuff in relation to this, because deep in me, I'm never gonna give up. That's the way it feels. And I don't know why I was thinking about that. I have some deep repository of anger and fear and some combination. For a long time, I thought it was just fear, I was just afraid. Now sometimes I think maybe it's more of a form of selfishness, meaning when I was very young I was like, I can't have my way, so fuck all this. I don't have a choice about it. I'm like a puppet; I have to go along with things. But on the inside, emotionally, I'm not having any of this.

[Laughter]

Person #4: It's so deep in me that I have no idea. I have a super analytical mind. To add that on top of *that*, meaning, I'm just playing with it and playing with it and playing with it, and I can't stop playing with it so to speak. Yeah. What do you do? I don't know. That's it.

CD 3, Track 13: Devon Shares

Michael: Is everybody kind of getting a better understanding of the statement on page 59 of the big-book that says, “Half measures availed us nothing?” What they might have *meant* when they said that? Devon, would you like to contribute to anything here or participate?

Devon: Sure, yeah. I obviously wasn't here yesterday so I just got this when you gave it to me in the meeting. It's sort of funny because I just started working with Michelle as a sponsor again, and I was gonna ask her today, So are we gonna get started on this fourth step, or what? I'm thinking I need to do that so I can get through my amends so I can stay sober. Because my deal is, I relapse. I relapse. My fear is that if I don't get busy, I'm not gonna stay sober. What I'm hearing through all of this is that it doesn't really matter how busy I get, I'm not gonna be able to keep myself sober. I feel like I've grasped that a little bit. More than I ever have in the past. I've been around AA on and off for eight years. It's like, six months, nine months, relapse, relapse. I've really related to everything everyone was saying, especially when Deborah was talking about... If I totally do have this awesome surrender, do I still get to be cool, do I still get to be edgy, do I still get to do things that are a little bit on the darker side? I like that shit. Like, I'm not fucking Mary Poppins.

[Laughter]

Devon: I don't want to be, you know. So there's a lot of fear of what I'm gonna turn into if I don't have my hands all over it. I feel like I'm in a pretty good place right now. I feel pretty peaceful on a pretty regular basis. I'm just waiting for the rug to get pulled out from underneath me. I'm just like, I better get busy or things are gonna go to shit again. As far as all the ego goes, and the telling the truth stuff, that's really hard for me, because I feel like I don't know how to tell the truth because I can't necessarily tell the difference between when I'm full of shit and when I'm not. I've always been in total ego mode and completely drive. I guess every now and then I'll speak some truth, and I'm like, Wow, that just sounds different. But that's so rare that I actually, truly feel like that. My goal is just to continue to keep an open mind and to accept that this is where I'm at in my recovery. I'm not recovered, and that this is where I'm at. And there's lots and lots of room to grow and to learn and to change and all that stuff. My goal is just to try to stay open to it. And hopefully my ego and all those other things will stay out of the way enough for that to be able to happen for me.

CD 4, Track 1: Feelings versus Facts

Michael: Okay, we're gonna start this little part of it by asking Josh and Michelle to share the difference between feelings and facts.

Josh: Feelings pass. Feelings are temporary states of emotion. Facts are truth. That's about all I got.

Michael: Okay, everybody here that?

Michelle: My experience with the difference between feelings and facts is that I try to make the truth and

facts about my feelings. I use the terminology, “I feel like I am abusive to my boyfriend when I’m angry.” And the truth is, That’s not a feeling, that’s a fact. That’s the difference. Feelings – the word – and women in particular like to use the word, “I feel like. It seems like. It’s sort of like.” Those are words I’ve learned that cover up facts. A fact is something that I do or I’ve done. It’s an event, and it’s the truth. A feeling is certainly – if we’re talking about a feeling level and talking about our feeling – and people use the word like, “Well, I feel like you don’t listen to me.” And I will say, “But what do you feel?” “Well, I feel like you don’t listen to me.” “But what is the feeling?” “Well, I’m angry.” Ah. That’s the difference. The feelings are words that describe whatever the emotion is, and a fact is just what happened.

Josh: Feelings – you can count all the feelings pretty much on your hands. Happy, sad, scared, angry, tired. Just a few things. Everything else is just something else. But we use *feeling* to describe all kinds of things.

Michael: So when we talk that way, what we do is remove ourself from the present and remove ourself from the truth. Everything is sort of nearly kind of almost *perhaps* something-er-rather. And it *sounds* honest. That’s its appeal. It *sounds* honest. It isn’t. But it sounds that way. It *allows* us to believe that we’re being honest about something when we’re not being honest about it at all. The example was a good one. “I feel you don’t like me.” That’s not a feeling. Now, that’s a thought. The feeling is, I’m angry. That’s the fact. That’s the truth.

Person #2: So there can be truth in feelings.

Michael: Only if you’re honest about them. It’s very helpful to listen to yourself talk. When you use what I call weasel words, like feel and think and kind of and maybe and almost and nearly and I guess... you’re weaseling. You’re going around something. Whatever comes after, “I think and I guess and I feel” ain’t gonna be the truth. Everything south of those things ain’t gonna be the truth, but it’s gonna sound like it. It’s easy to convince ourselves we’re being honest. But it’s a form of pseudo-honesty and psychobabble enables the hell out of it. It’s unfortunate. It’s something that Bill Wilson and Doctor Bob didn’t have to contend with seventy years ago when they were working with alcoholics. But everybody who comes out of a treatment center these days is full of psychobabble and buzzwords. “I’m shame based. Core issues.” What does all that mean? Who knows. Who the fuck knows what that means. You can, in the middle of your share, say, “I abuse food.” What the fuck does that mean? It doesn’t tell anybody anything about what happens with you and food. It’s just sort of nearly kind of the truth, and it sounds like I’m doing something, but it’s not. The whole point of that is: A lot of us feel that we’re alone in this problem. I’m the only one who’s this fucked-up. I’m the only one who’s got all this shit going on. I’m the only one who’s covering up the sadness. I’m the only one who has to stuff all this pain. I’m the only one who’s so afraid of my anger that if anybody found out about it or of the cork came out of my bottle, I’d kill somebody. I’m the only one. That’s not a feeling, that’s a fact. You *are* alone with your problem. And the value of doing something like we’re doing here, and people sharing honestly about what’s going on, is you get to find *this* out. That there are other people feeling exactly like you are, just as pissed off. Just as full of pretense. Just as phony. Suffering just as much. But in a lot of the groups that we’re in, it just ain’t safe to be honest about that. It’s just not safe. And that goes back to what I was saying yesterday about my sponsor telling me, “We gotta get AA out of those churches and treatment

centers and into people's houses where a safe space can be created for people to find *this* out. And begin to find a solution to this problem.

CD 4, Track 2: Seeing the Fire

Michael: Here's why. How many of you have been to an AA in a public building in some sort? Everybody, right? Because that's where they are. So every public building – think of whatever building you were in. We were in, what was that, Boys Club last week?

Many: Yeah.

Michael: See. Has everybody been to that Boys Club? Boys and Girls Club, is that what that is? Has everybody here been there? Where are the fire extinguishers in that building?

Andrea: Right in the corner.

Deborah: You *would* know.

Michael: Right behind the stapler.

[Laughter]

Michael: The point is, most people, walk in and out of public buildings. Every public buildings have to have fire extinguishers by law. But none of us care about them. Did anybody here think about that last night when you walked in, while you were there, when you walked out? Never even enters our mind. Why would anybody care where those fire extinguishers are? What would make you care?

Many: Fire

Michael: If there was a fire. The fire extinguishers are a solution to a problem. That's why they're there. But nobody cares where they are unless they see the fire. You have to see the fire in order to go look for a fire extinguisher. Steps two through twelve are a fire extinguisher. What do we do in here? Trying to see the fire.

CD 4, Track 3: Nearly All Have Recovered

So let's go back to our big-books. *There is a Solution*. “We.” Who's the *we* in this book? The first hundred people. “We of Alcoholics Anonymous know thousands of men and women who were once just as hopeless as Bill.” Just as hopeless as Bill. They weren't stock brokers like Bill. They weren't all rich like Bill. They didn't live the high-life like Bill. They all lived whatever life *they* lived. Their alcoholism took whatever form it took in their life and in their circumstances. But it isn't the outside circumstances. They were just as hopeless. We got rich people, poor people, people of every color, every race, every religion, male, female, old, and young. They're all alcoholic and they're all just as hopeless as Bill. Let's all read the next sentence together.

All: “Nearly all have recovered.”

Michael: *But you can't recover in AA! I'm always gonna be in recovery! Nobody ever recovers from alcoholism.* Not according to this book. I read the AA textbook, and it tells me again and again that we can be recovered from this. Remember we were talking yesterday about Andrea going back to the doctor after she had recovered from the flu? People don't go back to the doctor when they've recovered, do they? Why? 'Cause they've been restored to health. Is it possible for you to be free of all the crap we're talking about and that you're seeing in yourselves.

Person #4: What you've said in meetings, you hear about that you never get better, it never goes away. That the only way you're ever gonna be better is by going to meetings and getting a sponsor and doing the steps, but even *that* won't make you better.

Michael: Yeah, you hear a lot of things. And most of that came from treatment centers. It's got nothing to do with AA. It's somebody else's program.

Person #4: *While I was in meetings for ten years, my disease was out doing push-ups. So when I went out and relapsed, it kicked my butt.* I'm being a puppet – a parrot, I guess, to the things that I hear.

Michael: As far as I'm concerned, all of that stuff contradicts what's in my big-book.

Person #4: Okay, so we go through this process of the steps, and [inaudible]. But, my goal is to be able to help others. So I continue to go to meetings. I don't know, do I have to [inaudible]? Now I'm confused.

Michael: Cool. Just be willing to be confused. It's alright to be confused. As a matter of fact, I suffered a great deal of confusion as I was doing all this, and I whined to my sponsor about it, and he would say, "Clarity is only born of confusion." So if you're confused, just be confused, it won't last forever. If you're pissed, just be pissed, it won't last forever. If you're afraid, just be afraid, it won't last forever.

Josh: But won't it return?

Person #5: It's contradicting conception to the concept of recovered

Michael: The book is contradictory. The first half of the book and the second half of the book contradict each other. Well, there's a chapter in the big-book, and it's called The Family Afterward. Anybody aware of that? After what?

Person #5: After sobriety.

Fred: Recovered.

Michael: After being recovered. And everything after being recovered changes. And everything before recovered returns. So it's a good idea to become recovered, wouldn't you say?

Person #4: Yeah, I want the psychic change.

Michael: See, the promises don't occur beforehand. The Family Beforehand. No, the family beforehand has no solution. The family, afterward, does. The alcoholic beforehand has no solution. The alcoholic beforehand has a disease that does push-ups for ten years while you struggle and suffer, and then you drink.

Person #5: See, that's where I thought my faith was.

Michael: Watch out for those words like *thought* and *think*. There *is* a solution.

CD 4, Track 4: Answers versus Solution; Relapse

Michael: A friend of mine out in Sacramento came up with this really cool little thing.

[Michael writes on the board, probably something like “4 + 1”]

Michael: What's the solution?

Some people: Five.

Someone: Adding.

Michael: Five? Five? See...

Josh: No, that's the *answer*.

Michael: That's the answer, not the solution. You're right. How do you find the answer? You gotta know what *that* means.

Person #5: The plus.

Michael: If you know what *that* means, you can solve any problem that looks like that, because you know the solution. If you don't know what *that* means, then you gotta call your sponsor every day.

[Laughter]

Michael: And ask for the *answer* to your problem du jour.

Person #5: Oh, you laugh, but that's what we do.

As far as I'm concerned, I just want to pass on to you what my sponsor told me. He said his agenda or his mission was to make himself unnecessary in my life as soon as possible. When I sponsor people, that's what I want to do. I want to make myself unnecessary in a sponsee's life as soon as possible. That requires that the sponsee find a solution and stop looking for answers. You find your own answers once you find the solution.

Person #5: But then aren't you subject to...

Michael: You just never fucking stop.

[Laughter]

Michael: Everything south of *but* is closed-minded bullshit. I like you, but you gotta stop that. There *is* a *solution*. And once you find the solution, you're gonna find the promises. There's over two-hundred promises in the big-book. Most of them are good; some of them promise you you're gonna get drunk again. I got to meetings and I see people who chronically relapse. And when they chronically relapse, they come back to meetings, and they say, “Well, you all know me, my name is Jack, and I did it again.

And I'm so stupid, and I *chose* to drink, and I *chose* not to go to meetings, and I *chose* not to work the steps, and I *chose* this and I *chose* that.” That's not what the big-book says. The big-book doesn't say you're gonna go out and relapse because you chose to. It says we're gonna go out and relapse if we're full of fear. It says we're gonna go out and relapse if we're full of resentment. It says we're gonna go out and relapse if amends aren't made. It says we're gonna go out and relapse if we fail to enlarge our spiritual life. It says we're gonna go out and relapse if our sex conduct in any way continues to harm other human beings or ourselves. It tells us very specifically why relapse occurs. It's got nothing to do with, “I chose to go to meetings or not go to meetings,” or, “I didn't call my sponsor,” or, “I didn't read the book,” or whatever. See, that sounds so honest. It's not honest. Once again, it's that *faux* honesty.

CD 4, Track 5: An Illness of this Sort

Michael: Next page. “An illness of this sort....” Have you opened your mind to that? As long as we continue to judge ourselves in terms of things like right and wrong – “I'm wrong. I'm bad. I'm weak. I'm stupid. I'm” whatever comes after *I'm* for you – then you haven't accepted that this is an illness. Just notice that. If you haven't accepted that it's an illness over which you have no control, then you're going to continue to judge yourself and be wrong and struggle. “An illness of this sort, and we have come to believe it an illness, involves those about us in a way no other human sickness can. If a person has cancer, all are sorry for him, and no one is angry or hurt.” So, look at your own experience in life if you've had a relative with a catastrophic disease of some sort, or maybe yourself, or somebody you know. We don't take it personally when another person has cancer, even though their cancer or their disease – it could be multiple sclerosis, AIDS – the people around the person who has the disease tend not to take that personally, even though they may be greatly inconvenienced. What's true about alcoholism is: Everybody gets pissed. Everybody gets angry. Everybody is hurt. An alcoholic in the middle of all this crap going on says, “I'm only hurting myself.” I said that for years, and I believed it. Leave me the fuck alone. If I'm hurting anybody, I'm only hurting myself. Totally blind self-centered point of view. Certainly not the truth, but I believed it. “If a person has cancer, all are sorry for him, and no one is angry or hurt. But not so with the alcoholic illness.” So why? Why is it? And they tell you. “For with it,” meaning alcoholism, “there goes annihilation,” which means total destruction, “of all the things worthwhile in life.” So we can ask ourselves: What's that got to do with page 52? Anything? See any connection there? Annihilation of all the things worth while in life. My relationships don't work. There is no love in my life. I'm full of fear. Miserable.

Person #5: Miserable and irritable and discontent because everything around you is a fucking war zone.

Michael: As I've told people many times, my past, if you look over my shoulder, all you see is a smoking ruin. Blood and body parts all over the place. Relationships.... Later on in the book, they'll talk about “Sweet relationships are dead.” Oh, yeah. It says, “It engulfs all whose lives touch the sufferers.” It was true, see. *Engulf* means to swallow up. And we know that's true, we can just look out, we can look in our own experience of people we've pissed off and shit that's happened in our own experience. Where does Al-Anon come from? And Where does CoDA come from? And where does Ala-Tot and Ala-Teen come

from?

CD 4, Track 6: Alcoholism and Family

Michael: See, all those twelve step programs for non-alcoholic people who suffer from alcoholism – how did they get engulfed? How'd they get so fucked-up if they don't drink alcohol? Do drugs?

Deborah: Second-hand alcohol

Julie: That's something I'd be really pissed about. Second-hand alcoholism.

Josh: Treatment centers, they say that's part of a family disease.

Michael: They're the hardest people to work with. They're just full of blame. We're bad enough. How many people in here had alcoholic parents? I did. Yeah, see. How many people didn't. Okay. Now, those of you who didn't and those of you who did, notice that it isn't necessary in order for alcoholism to be there. Just notice that. That's an old idea that a lot of people have.

CD 4, Track 7: Mental Pictures; Homeless Alcoholics

Michael: Deborah and I were having a conversation earlier, and one of the things we were talking about is pictures of what alcoholic is. All of us have a *picture* of what it means to be an alcoholic. And for most of us, it's a bag lady or a guy in a trench coat pushing a cart and living under a bush. And we have that picture in our mind, and that picture – we compare that with what we see in the mirror, and we say, “Not me.” As long as you have that picture in your mind, you're gonna be closed-minded about yourself truly being an alcoholic. Because while the picture may represent *an* alcoholic, it certainly doesn't represent *alcoholism* across the board. How do we know that's true? I know it's true because I've spent a lot of time in parks and at Salvation Armies and detoxes talking to men and women in places like that. And it's very interesting to do that because – see, I had always assumed that those people were born out there on the streets. They've just always lived on the street. And I had to find out that they weren't born out on the street. They used to be right where I am. There's doctors down there, and lawyers and nurses and school teachers. There's firemen and truck drivers and bakers, priests, nuns. And every single one of them at some point passed through the point that you're at. When they were at the point that you're at, they said, “I'll never get that bad. That would never happen to me.” *That's* what real alcoholism is. And at the point they said that to themselves – where you're at – they were totally engulfed in their alcoholism and didn't know it. And that's what they ended up with. That's where it took them. Another thing you need to know about those people out on the street is that they are strong sons-a-bitches, because most people – way more than 90% of alcoholics – die before they get *there*. Those are the people who survived. They deserve some respect for that. They've suffered a lot, and they still are. Another thing about those people on the street that I've learned is: Most of them, you can't talk to them about AA, because they've been in AA, and they fucking hate it. And they hate us, and they hate me, and they hate this book. They didn't find a solution. And they didn't want to hear that shit anymore. And that's just a tragedy. So, I'd like you

to notice, number one, that you've got that picture, and I want you to understand that as long as that picture is in your mind telling you, "Not me," you're gonna stay closed-minded, and step one is out of your reach. That is my own personal experience.

CD 4, Track 8: It Engulfs All

Julie: For me, too, not only have I had that picture and said, "Not me," but other people around me. "You look like such a nice girl. You can't be an alcoholic."

Michael: There you go.

Julie: People have that impression. "Oh, you're just having some problems." Or, "It's a phase."

Deborah: It's the go-to-TJ-score-heroin phase.

[Laughter]

Julie: When I went into treatment, they thought I was one of the counselors.

Michael: Cool. You got 'em fooled! One of my best friends is doing seven and a half years of prison in northern California because of what you just said. Had a conversation with him many times. Actually many conversations. And I just kept telling him, "You've got this clean-cut, all-American boy look going on, and you've got everybody fooled but God and your obsession." See, everybody in the world was telling him what you just said. "You run a business, you got all this shit, you got two kids and a wife, da-da-da-da-da." And he just like fucking couldn't hear it. Didn't want to hear it. He's paying the price. Good guy. Very sick, and just like totally closed-minded. And that's just one of the tragic situations that happens. There's a reason that the big-book tells us that we need to be those three things: honest, open-minded, and willing. Notice what our old ideas are and let go of them. As long as we got this not-me, -I'm-not-that-bad thing going on, this stuff is useless to you. Let's go back to the book. "There goes annihilation of all things worthwhile." I'd like you all to take a look at what it says here. We don't have time to do it right now, but notice that you could sit down in your living rooms and turn off the TV and the stereo and the telephone and ask yourself about all the things worthwhile in life getting annihilated such as love and joy and happiness and honesty and dignity and integrity – stuff like that. Depending on the progression of your disease, if you were in a situation such as I find myself in, you might notice where the marriage went, where the bank account went, where the cars went, where the family went, where your friends went. It depends on what you've lost what being annihilated... whatever position you find yourself in. Where'd the motivation go? Has it been annihilated? Is that 'cause you're bad, or are you suffering? Are you back on page 52 again? Can you begin to see why judging it as bad and looking at this as right and wrong is just gonna keep you stuck? All it does is perpetuate it.

Person #5: Guilt is the fuel that keeps us in the cycle.

Someone: I have a hard time, 'cause I feel like I'm always judged by people who's not an alcoholic – my family and other friends and stuff like that.

Michael: Do you feel that, or is that a fact?

Someone: I don't know.

Michael: It's probably a fact.

Someone: I was gonna say that, 'cause people don't understand alcoholism.

Michael: Exactly. Says that in a couple of pages here.

Person #5: A world of misunderstanding and ignorance.

Michael: They're gonna judge ya. Goddamn right. They judged the shit out of me. I didn't feel that. It was true. And it wasn't just my family and friends. It was my bosses, coworkers, society at large, police officers, school teachers, cab drivers, other drivers on the freeway as I zipped through my self-centered life. [Inaudible]. "It engulfs all whose lives touch the sufferer's." Are you a sufferer? Why is that word here again? Why doesn't it say, "It engulfs all whose lives touch the bad person's?" Why doesn't it say that? So let's look at our experience on this last sentence. It says, "It," *it* refers to alcoholism, "brings with it" a whole bunch of things. So let's ask ourselves. You look at your own experiences, has there been any misunderstanding about this in your own personal experience, in your own mind? Any confusion, misunderstanding, struggle, any of that? Has there been any misunderstanding with your friends and family? Yeah, they misunderstand. See, we get mad at them for misunderstanding; *we* don't understand. Any fierce resentment in your life? Coming out of you towards other people or from other people towards you? Shit. How 'bout financial insecurities? Any of that? See, this is the experience of alcoholism. Any disgusted friends? It's kind of like I lived in an arena of disgust. [Inaudible]. Okay, those of you who have kids, this is a toughy: Warped lives of blameless children. This whole thing about being a bad parent, a bad mom, a bad dad. There's that word *bad*.

CD 4, Track 9: Warped Lives of Blameless Children

Michael: So, for those of you who have that particular problem, and it is a big one in Alcoholics Anonymous, the bad-mom-bad-dad thing, I would just like to point you to page [xxix] in the fourth edition books. The last paragraph on the page, which says, "I do not hold." Is everybody there? Now, the *I* here, once again, this is Doctor Silkworth writing. He says, "I do not hold with those who believe that alcoholism is" entirely a plug-in-the-jug deal. A problem of mental control. Just put the plug in the jug, go to meetings – that's all mental control. "Many men who had, for example, worked a period of months on some problem or business deal which was to be settled on a certain date favorably to them." These people were not experiencing a problem with business. They were experiencing a success with business. And in the middle of this imminent success, what do they do? They took a drink a day or so prior to the date. Now, if they're an alcoholic and they have the allergy to alcohol, what happens as soon as they take a drink? They're gonna trigger the allergy. And the more they drink, the more they want. So what's gonna happen? They're gonna get drunk. That's what he says. "The phenomenon of craving *at once* became paramount to all other interests so that the important appointment was not met. These men were not drinking to escape." They had nothing to escape from at that point. "They were drinking to overcome a craving beyond their mental control," regardless of the fact that they were about to succeed in

this business deal. Let's go back now to where it says, "They took a drink."

Julie: Which page?

Deborah: Back to the previous page.

Michael: We're going back to the paragraph where we started. Let's go down in that paragraph where it says "They took a drink." Alcoholics who took a drink. Let's get rid of the *business man* that's mentioned here, and we're gonna put in *parent*. This is a parent with children who need to be loved and nurtured and raised and treated correctly and guided and all the things that parents need to do with children. These parents take a drink, and what happens? The phenomenon of craving at once becomes... what's the next word?

All: Paramount.

Michael: What does paramount mean?

Someone: Bigger than they are.

Michael: Bigger than everything. The most important thing. The driving force. The one and only goal. The primary motivation. Paramount. Above everything. So, paramount to all other interests. Of who? The parents. What are the other interests of these parents?

Someone: The kids.

Michael: The kids and their responsibilities. Could this disease be that powerful? It is paramount. It is *more important* than all other interests, those interests being children! Children! Could this thing be that powerful? Nah, that's not possible – these have to be bad people. Nothing could be that powerful. *Or*, maybe it is. See, I've worked with people, especially drug addicts and in particular crack addicts, who have sold their children – traded their children's sexuality – for drugs. I know an obstetrician in Albuquerque, a really neat guy who's a non-alcoholic. He works in the University of New Mexico Hospital in Albuquerque, and he tells me that forty to fifty percent of all babies being born in Albuquerque are being born addicted to something. That they have learned how to detox newborn infants. Forty to fifty percent in the public hospital of Albuquerque, New Mexico. So I'm sure it's similar in Los Angeles and Chicago and Detroit and New York. Children born addicted to heroine, crack, meth... it couldn't be that powerful – that it could override a mother's natural sort of thing, a father's natural... It's not possible. Or is it? If what this books tells me is correct and what my eyes and personal experience tells me is correct, it's not only possible, *it's real*. Now, the whole world judges that based on misunderstanding. And I perfectly understand that, because I used to judge it. I judged *my parents* for the way they treated me. We used to get left all over south Texas.

[Laughter]

Michael: Me and my brothers and sisters. Scary. Some weird shit happened. Big resentments. But once I started to understand my own alcoholism, I could then understand theirs and the power of this. That kind of understanding – seeing what was really going on – is what allowed me to have some forgiveness and some compassion in my life. But first I had to open *my* mind and do something about *my* problem in

order to see that. But this whole thing about the bad-mom-bad-parent thing is a show stopper. And it kills people. So if you have a problem with it, you gotta open your mind and realize: “An illness of this sort, and we have come to believe it an illness, involves those about us in a way that no other human sickness can.” Warped lives of blameless children. That's right. It does happen. It's real. I'd also like you to know that the book says there's a solution to that: The Family *AFTER*ward! Not Beforehand! Fred! Especially Fred!

[Laughter]

CD 4, Track 10: Discussion

Josh: One thing that fucked with me a lot, and it was a precursor to my relapse, was that I was living on page 52 after so long in the program. And I was doing some of these things in supposed sobriety. That's why getting my head around this before-and-after-recovery is essential. Because take the alcohol, and I'm still doing this stuff.

Person #5: Right. Before and after *recovered*. Not before and after I stopped drinking.

Josh: Right. It's still happening.

Person #5: 'Cause there's a world of misunderstanding in AA with each other in the fellowship that we're supposed to be a certain way now that we're sober or now that you've been sober so many years. There is an expectation in the fellowship that is *deadly*. It is *deadly*. And I have been a part of it. I'm like, you shouldn't be there. How could you be so selfish after all these years? And now, I understand how anybody can be not only selfish but way sicker than they were drinking. Way more self-willed than when they were drinking. Because now there's the image thing that you try to live up to in the meetings and in your work place and in yourself. Like, I'm supposed to be... fill-in-the-blank.

Josh: And my parents aren't alcoholics. They're not drinkers. I don't know what they are. But it gives me some understanding of them as well, because I was doing the same shit not drinking.

Michael: What was your question, Fred?

Fred: My question was regarding that paragraph, “These men were not drinking to escape.” I'm not thinking about... once they start, it's out of control, for sure. The question is, why did they take the first drink, and was that not an escape?

Michael: Well, the business success was happening. Have you heard the HALT theory in treatment centers? Don't get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired? Well, if this is true, this example, then don't get too successful or happy either.

[Laughter]

Michael: See, our real alcoholic is gonna drink hungry, angry, lonely, tired, successful, happy, rich, poor, meetings, no meetings, sponsor, no sponsor. As long as you are in beforehand mode, drinking is gonna happen, it's just *when*. So, the question is valid, but the reason we drink is: the obsession is still there.

The alcoholic mind is still present. That's why they start. Step one, why does the alcoholic do it again, trigger the allergy, and go through the shit?

Josh: The apparent contradiction is that the third tradition says that the requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking, but the big-book says that desire is of no avail.

Michael: That's our next session. We will cover that and why human resources do not work.

Person #5: Well, you know like it says how you won't have an effective mental defense against the first drink? There will come a time, pre-recovered, there will come a time where it's not about rational thought or an event. It's just a strange mental blank spot that happens, and you find yourself drinking at the bar. Those are the stories we hear about more and more in meetings. Like it says, at the end of a perfect day, not a cloud on the horizon, and I ask myself, how could this happen again? That's like what Michael was talking about yesterday about the baffling nature of the obsession. It's still in operation whether we're aware of it or not.

Josh: We build a bright outlook for ourselves and our family and pull the whole structure down on our head. Get tight at the wrong time. That's the thing that I'm master at. The one thing I'm good at in my life. Grasping defeat out of the jaws of victory.

[Laughter]

Michael: This too shall return

[Laughter continues.]

Michael: You have a question?

Julie: I was just gonna say, that was my last experience with the last relapse that I had. I was at a meeting the night before. I was doing all the things that it looked like I was supposed to be doing, and there was nothing wrong. And I drank, and I couldn't explain to anyone *why* at all.

Michael: That's right out of this chapter. "Once in a while he may tell the truth, and the truth strange to say is that he does not know.

Julie: Exactly. It's so true. I wanted to come up with an answer really bad, but I couldn't. I had a whole bunch of different ones, but none of them were really like....

Michael: It's right here in chapter two. It's amazing. This book's amazing. What didn't we cover there? Oh, sad wives and parents, sad husbands.

Someone: Very sad.

Michael: Yeah. Fucked-up people. People get fucked-up dealing with people like me. "What's wrong with you?"

Andrea: This is funny. What I find in this book is they're always talking about the wives, the sad wives. Like women didn't drink then.

Julie: 'Cause this was in like 1930....

Andrea: Oh, I know, but obviously they *did*, but they didn't...

Deborah: They have a lot of good stories about women.

Andrea: Yeah, I know, later in the book, I know that. But in here, they always talk about the husband.

Josh: What they say is that Bill [inaudible]. They named the book *As Bill Sees It*, and then the truth is: Lois Remembers.

[Laughter]

Michael: “We hope this volume will inform and comfort those who *are*....” Anybody who is, are, or who may be affected? “There are many highly competent psychiatrists who have dealt with us and found it sometimes impossible to persuade an alcoholic to discuss his situation without reserve.” Okay, how many people in here besides me have been under the care of a shrink, a counselor, a psychotherapist, a psychologist, a psychologist, or anything else and lied to that practitioner? See, that's what they're saying. They found it impossible to persuade us to discuss our situation honestly. They ask us how much we drink, we lie about it. They ask us what we've been up to, we lie about it. I have never met a real alcoholic who couldn't spin the most brilliant psychologists in five minutes. It's just a piece of cake. We walk in, and we start telling them what they want to hear. We weave a tale. And if we're there to get a prescription, we're really good at it. If we're there against our will, we're [inaudible]. But either way, we don't tell them the truth. That's just what they say. That's our experience. Okay, “Strangely enough wives, parents, and intimate friends usually find us even more unapproachable than do the psychiatrists or the doctor.” So ask yourself. Are there people in your life with titles like wives, husbands, boyfriends, parents, good friends to whom you have lied about what's going on with you?

CD 4, Track 11: Trust Between Sponsor and Sponsee is Vital

Michael: They find us even more unapproachable. It's really a phenomenal thing if you think about it. The closer you get in the social circle of an alcoholic, the less honesty you find. Back when I was able to still work, I had to take business trips quite frequently. I worked for a large aerospace company. One of the things I had to do was fly up to Seattle and go to these business *things* up there. And when I was on these trips, the meeting I had to go to were generally forty-five minutes long, maybe two hours long. Sometimes I'd have to work the whole day, but mostly it was just to meet somebody and get something accomplished. So I might be there for two or three days, and I'm living in a hotel on an expense account. I've got absolutely nothing to do, and I spent all the time that I wasn't working in a bar. So I'm sitting on a bar stool, and here's Joe Blow, shoe salesman from Oshkosh, Wisconsin sitting there. Joe Blow and I are drinking. Joe Blow drinks the way I do. This is cool! So I'll sit there, and I'll tell Joe Blow things about my life that my wife doesn't know. That I never told the shrink. 'Cause I ain't never gonna fucking see Joe Blow again. See, Joe Blow is a total stranger in a bar. But I can get honest with Joe Blow to a certain degree, but my wife would never know that. No clue. It's exactly what they're saying here. The closer people are to us, the bigger the threat. The bigger the threat, the less truth. That shit starts. So just look at your own experience. Drunk or sober. See, we're not honest with ourselves. Right there in the middle

of the social circle there isn't any honesty. Okay, this is in italics. *“But, the ex-problem drinker,”* that means recovered alcoholic, *“who has found this solution,”* not some other solution or come up with his or her own program.... *“The ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is properly armed with”* fact, not feelings, advice, opinions, analysis, or anything else. And the facts are about who? About himself or herself. This is about the person who is making a twelfth step call on a newcomer. *“They can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours.”* How do we do that? The book tells us exactly. We stick to our experience, our strength, and our hope. That's it. We don't tell newcomers what to do or whether they're bad or not. “If I was you, I'd.... Why don't you.... Goddamn get your shit together.” And all that shit. Okay, everybody read the next sentence with me.

All: *“Until such an understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished.”*

Michael: Okay, so somebody comes into AA, they put the plug in the jug, and they pretend to be sober for five years, and then they get drunk. What got accomplished?

Someone: Little or nothing.

Michael: Little or nothing. So we ask that person, “Have you had a sponsor?” They go, “I've had five.” Okay? Why didn't it work? They didn't trust 'em. So, I want you to trust your own bullshit sniffers. Every alcoholic has one. See, if your bullshit sniffer is going off, you're not gonna trust your sponsor. And if you don't trust your sponsor, you won't be honest with him or her. If you can't be honest with him or her, then you're not gonna recover. Because this program requires that we be honest. So you gotta have a sponsor you can trust. You need to understand that part of the deal in Alcoholics Anonymous is giving it back, working with others. If you're living a life that demonstrates dishonesty to other people in AA, they're not gonna trust *you*. And then you can't work with them, and you can't be of any service. So you're stepping on your own recovery. Does that make sense? See, number one rule if you want to do some twelfth step call is: Don't lie to newcomers. At all. Ever. Don't gossip about newcomers. Don't share their shit. Unless you have their permission. There has to be trust. There has to be integrity going on. Think about this. A sponsor in AA, or somebody in AA who wants to work with a newcomer... we're asking *a lot* from that person who may have really been kicked around for many drinks when they showed up at AA... we're asking *a lot* if we ask for their trust. We really are. That's a pretty big deal for a newcomer. We're asking a lot if we're asking for their respect. These things aren't granted, they're earned. Part of the deal in being a recovered alcoholic is carrying the message. That's part of your agreement with God in Alcoholics Anonymous for what you get. That's part of the responsibility. We've got this little “I am responsible” thing that goes on. Well, yeah. But how many of you have had a sponsor who was a gossip? And ask yourself, do you really trust that person? See? Do you trust a gossipy sponsor? Hell no! Are you gonna tell them the truth? No. No, you're not. Well, what kind of sponsor are *you* gonna be? What kind of example are you gonna set? It's a two-way street. What kind of life are you gonna live if you want that from somebody else. We've all have to consider these things. We want honesty from other people, but we don't demand it of ourselves. We want integrity from other people, but we don't demand it of ourselves. Why not? Where's it really gotta start? For those of you who are really new, just going through the steps, I want you to understand. I tell people all the time that I work with: If you don't trust me, I'll help you find a sponsor you do. 'Cause if you don't trust me, if I

haven't won your confidence for one reason or another, that's okay with me, let me help you find somebody you *do* trust. Because that's what you need is somebody you can and will trust. 'Cause you've got fourth steps to write, fifth steps to do, you've got personal shit that's gotta be cleaned up, got amends to make. You need to be able to be honest. It's vitally important. It's the responsibility of the sponsor to take care of that in one form or another. I want you to understand how important that is. And I want you to be honest with yourselves, take a look at whatever relationships you're in, and see what you're gonna do about that. Also if you're new, remember you've got a right to ask questions of your sponsor. Questions like: Have you worked all twelve steps? Are you willing to share your experience of each and every one of those steps with me? Can I ask you questions about that? Are you gonna work with me out of the big-book of *Alcoholics Anonymous*? If not, if they hesitate, if they give you some kind of song-and-dance, go get another sponsor. Thank them. Thank them for their time. But go get another sponsor. I say these things only to those of you who would like to recover, who would like to be recovered, who'd like to know what the promises are about.

CD 4, Track 12: Restore Us to Sanity, Not Sobriety

Michael: Page twenty-three. There is a Solution. In order to go look at the solution, first we gotta see... what?

All: The problem.

Michael: Line three, it says, "These observations would be academic and pointless if our friend never took the first drink thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. Therefore, the main problem of the alcoholic centers in" his body. If he just puts the plug in the jug, he's okay. No. See, what are they telling us? Put the plug in the jug, at some point, you're gonna take the first drink. And once you take the first drink, the allergy takes over. So the main problem is: How do you solve the problem of the sober alcoholic being powerless over taking the first drink? Therefore, that tells us step one is about the sober person, not about the drunk person. Everybody got that? So, step two says, "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to..." what?

All: Sanity.

Michael: Not sobriety. 'Cause guess what, you restored yourself to sobriety. You did.

Someone: What do you mean by that?

Michael: I mean that exactly what I said. You put the plug in the jug, and you went to meetings.

Someone: Oh, oh, oh.

Michael: See, the guy on the street can restore himself to sobriety any time he wants to. He just can't stay there. Ninety-eight percent of the people in Alcoholics Anonymous can't stay there. That's why we have this big turnover rate, high relapse rate. Just about any AA group you go to, if you go on October the fifth with a wide-angle lens and take a picture of the group, and you wait one year, and on October the fifth you go back with the same camera, and you take a picture of the same group, and you compare the two

photographs, what do you think you're gonna notice? The meeting is still there, it's still full of people. The illusion is: It's working. But if you compare the photographs, you're gonna get a rude awakening. And by the way, there are only two awakenings, and one of them is *rude*.

[Laughter]

CD 5, Track 1: Picture of Insanity

Michael: See, you can get yourselves sober. I got myself sober many times. I just couldn't stay there. Any alcoholic can quit. Any alcoholic can get himself or herself sober. That's not the problem. You can't stay there. That's the problem. That's what this is telling us. The main problem exists in the *mind* of the alcoholic. That's why step two says we need to be restored to sanity. We've all got this picture. Remember, I told you we had a picture of an alcoholic in our mind, and we compared it to what we see in the mirror, and it's not us. We have this idea of what insane looks like, and we compare it to us, and it doesn't match up either. Couldn't be me. The problem's not really in my mind. Yet, the big-book says the problem really is in your mind. It's very clear, isn't it? Doesn't it say that in *your* book? There's nothing I'm making up. Therefore the main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind rather than in his body. It's a two-part problem.

CD 5, Track 2: More on the Obsession

Michael: So we're gonna talk about control for a minute. And I have this little diagram up here, and this is the bad news. This is what Bill Wilson used to call the two-edged sword of alcoholism. This is what Doctor Bob did not understand. Those of you who have read some AA history know that Doctor Bob knew what the solution was before Bill Wilson knew. Doctor Bob had been trying to implement the solution for two or three years before Bill Wilson ever heard about the solution. And yet Doctor Bob couldn't get sober. Bill Wilson came and told him what the problem was. As soon as he understood that there was a fire, that's when the fire extinguisher started to make some sense to him. He actually knew more about the solution than Bill did. It's kind of fascinating. The whole issue is control. Another word for control is what?

Josh: Manage

Michael: Manage. And our lives are...?

Many: Unmanageable.

Michael: Unmanageable or not controllable or out of control. Something like that. Those of us who had parents who were alcoholics... if you're anything like me, you said, "I'll never be like that. Like my dad. I'm never gonna be like that. *But*, I'll drink" So what's the assumption when I see what alcohol does and I say, "I'll never be like that, but I'm going to drink." The assumption is I can control it where my idiot father couldn't. Where my idiot uncle couldn't. Where all those idiot people out there who are alcoholics *can't*, I *can*. That's the basic assumption. This is what allows us to even start. We assume that we can

control it. It turns out to be a rather arrogant assumption, doesn't it? But that's the basic thing. That's ego: I can control it, they can't. I'm strong, they're weak. I'm strong, they're stupid. I'll never get that bad; if I ever get anywhere near that bad, I'd quit. All that stuff. So there is an assumption underneath everything going on. So I'm gonna control it and enjoy it. So I start doing *this*, but I have *that*. So when I start drinking it, I have the abnormal reaction to alcohol. Normal people, when they drink, the more they drink the less they want. And that looks like *this* to me, but it isn't. But I assume that it is. Except my reaction is abnormal, so when I do *this* – the more I drink, the more I want – and I'm not meeting this assumption, what's wrong? I don't know. I assume I'm weak. Bad. Something. I'm gonna put some label on that. So I'm gonna try that again. I called it *learning how to drink* when I was a young drinker. I gotta learn how to drink. So you go through this for however long you go through this. For me, it was quite a few years before I got to the point where it started to dawn on me that I couldn't do *this* to *this*. Couldn't control it. So I gotta do something about this. What am I gonna do about it. How am I gonna gain *this* over *this*? I'm gonna do *that*.

Andrea: Can you say the words for the benefit of the tape?

Michael: Oh. Okay. So I gotta stop drinking. That's what I need to do. At least for a while. Stopping drinking was gonna tell me that I had control over drinking. If I could stop, then I had proven to myself I didn't have a problem. So I'd go over here, and I'd do this thing called not-drinking. So we get lots of people in AA who don't realize that being in this place called not-drinking is nothing more than an effort to control drinking.

Someone: Oh!

Michael: This is plug-in-the-jug, go-to-meeting land. This is my-own-program land. Keep-your-butt-in-the-seat land. And that's all it is. It's a self-willed attempt to control drinking by not drinking it. Get it? It's very simple. Okay, but I couldn't ever stay there. Why couldn't I stay there? Because I've got an obsession in my mind. And the great obsession of every alcoholic... anybody remember what it is? Page 30?

Michael and others: Somehow, someday, to control and therefore enjoy drinking.

Michael: So, there is no way to do this safely if the book is correct. Why? Because I have an allergy. I have an abnormal reaction. Every time I start drinking, I'm going to desire more and more and more. I'm going to go through the well-known stages of a spree, get fucked up, have all that terrible stuff happen to me. I'm gonna emerge remorseful. I'm gonna go over here – firm resolution to quit – and then I'm gonna repeat the cycle. So why can't I stay over *here*? The book tells me there's a reason; it's called an obsession. This is the main problem. If I didn't have this obsession, then I could be in a place where sobriety was possible without danger of ever triggering this thing again. This is not curable. But then the bad news is: there's all this psychiatric and medical information in the big-book that says this isn't treatable either, the obsession. Dr. Silkworth says you can't fix the mind. Carl Jung is quoted at the end of chapter two – this isn't fixable, the mind of the chronic alcoholic.

CD 5, Track 3:

Someone: Can you tell them the original definition of *obsession*. What they meant when they wrote it?

Michael: Yeah. In the 30s and 40s.... Now, I'm gonna tell you this 'cause I've looked it up, but I'm gonna ask you to do it yourself. Go check it out for yourself. When I tell you these things don't believe them. Go check it out for yourself. So go to a library and find a dictionary that was written in the 20s, 30s, 40s, something like that, and look up the word *obsession*. And you're gonna find something that will scare you. It talks about things like possession by a spirit. Being haunted. In the 30s and 40s, if somebody told you you had an obsession, you'd go *whoa*. The word *obsession* itself has lost its power. And we say things like, "I'm obsessing over Oreo cookies." That's not what an obsession is. An obsession is a powerful thing. It's a subconscious thing. Remember all that subconscious stuff that you read overnight? Yeah. An obsession is an idea that doesn't respond to reason. It defies the conscious mind. No matter what. And most of the time, you can't see it, you're not even aware of it. People go for years, and since they're not consciously thinking of drinking, thinking about drinking, wanting a drink, desiring a drink, they say.... I hear people in AA all the time: "God has removed my obsession." Nah. Nah.

Devon: I have a question. Would this be like – 'cause I was just thinking that. But then I think about the other things that I truly have an obsession about. Would this be one of those areas where it spans out into other directions? Into other things?

Person #5: Into the cycle of a spree with other things? Is that what you mean?

Michael: Yeah, this obsession is where that cycle comes from.

Devon: Yeah. That's what I'm asking.

Josh: This is the *great* obsession. Those are little obsessions on top of it.

Devon: I don't think of it with drinking anymore, but I have other things that I am certainly, certainly obsessed. I don't know any other way to put it.

Michael: See, but maybe the truth is: what you're calling those other things are fitting into a cycle that's being run by *this* obsession.

Devon: Right, right, yeah. I got you.

Person #5: So it's like I said, like when the desire to drink has been lifted, that doesn't mean the *obsession* to drink has been lifted. There's a difference.

Michael: Exactly.

Josh: I never would have bought this if I hadn't picked up. Never. Nothing you could have told me that would have never made me buy that concept if I hadn't picked up.

Person #5: If it hadn't been lifted from you? You thought for sure it had been lifted from you?

Josh: I never wanted to drink. I never thought about it. It never crossed my mind. And nine years after getting sober, I was drinking. What the fuck is going on? How did this happen?

Michelle #2: Can you explain what you just said?

Person #5: Well, let's say you go to treatment. You get out of treatment, and the desire to pick up alcohol has, according to us in meetings, been lifted. I don't want to drink today. Which may simply be because the allergy is not currently engaged. You take alcohol out of the body, eventually you stop wanting alcohol if you are allergic to alcohol, correct? But the obsession to drink has not been lifted. Until the entire psychic change has happened we are not, as they say, safe.

Josh: That's evidenced by the fact that despite the fact that I'm not drinking, I'm still living on page 52.

Person #6: But you're saying that the obsession is never lifted.

Michael: I'm saying it *can* be; that's the solution. But in an undiscovered state, you've still got it, whether you know it or not.

Person #6: But I thought I heard you say that people that are saying, "God has removed the obsession to drink" is wrong.

Michael: The point... I did say that. And it's quite often I hear people say that, and it's obviously not true. They're mistaken.

Julie: 'Cause they're still beforehand.

Someone: Like I would say that about drinking, but there's other areas in my life that are truly twisted.

Michael: As a sponsor, all I have to do.... See, I listen to people. I listen to what they tell me. And I don't believe it, and I don't disbelieve it. I just listen to it. But, like, if I was working with you, I would listen to you, but I would observe how you talk and what you do and what you do in your life. And if I see *this* going on, I know the obsession hasn't been lifted even though you tell me, "God has removed my obsession." But I'll know you haven't. It's not a judgment; it's just observing.

Someone: Well, why would you be then one to be able to know whether or not someone's obsession has been lifted?

Michael: Because mine got lifted. I know the difference. It doesn't make me great, wonderful, anything like that. But see, any good sponsor will tell you the same thing.

Someone: So you would really say that there's no part of your life that's living on page 52?

Michael: Nuh-uh.

Someone: Nothing.

Andrea: She's asking you for proof.

[Laughter]

Michael: I can tell you, I don't live on page 52. It's just words. You'd have to come and hang around with me and watch.

Someone: And how long ago were you not like that?

[Laughter]

Michael: I will answer any and all of those kind of questions when we're done. I don't want to sit here and talk about me. The reason we're talking about me is 'cause nobody wants to talk about this.

[Laughter]

Someone: Busted again!

Michael: See, a whole bunch of information about me isn't gonna help your recovery. This information, if you can look at it honestly, might save your life. So I'd rather you look at that. But I'm certainly willing to answer any and all personal questions you have when we're done tonight. We'll go out there... ask away. I tell you my experience with all of it.

Fred: Can I ask you a question about this?

Michael: About this? Yes.

Fred: From my experience, I relate to how you're describing all this except for... what you're saying is that it's actually my... 'cause I have all these pathologies, these dysfunctions or page 52 stuff going for sure, so.... You're saying that it's got to do with drinking.

Michael: Yes, I do.

Fred: And that's the part that I don't get. I've thought about drinking, not so much recently, but I definitely could drink again. Last year I almost did. It's amazing that I didn't. So it's not like it's gone. I don't believe that. But I don't see how that's the primary driver of my dysfunctions.

Michael: I think that's a great question.

CD 5, Track 4: A Mega-Motherfucker

Michael: The answer to your question is: The end result of all your pathologies is gonna be a drink. That's where it's gonna take you as you deal with all your pathologies. That tells me something. Now, let's think about obsession. If it's really as powerful as it really is, would it make sense to you, being the cunning-baffling-powerful thing that it is, that a good strategy is to get you looking at something called your core issues and all your pathologies and saying, "That's the problem in your life. Not me, the great obsession. All this is something other than alcoholism. So let's get you all involved in *that*." And then you get all involved in that. And then if you look, you'll notice you never solve any of it. None of it ever gets solved. It gets thought about, analyzed, talked about, discussed, looked at, inventoried even. But it never gets solved, you never get free, and then you end up drunk. All of us can look at our own experience of all the things we've done in that cycle looking for a sense of ease and comfort including religion and spiritual pursuits and all sorts of things that bring a sense of ease and comfort. We always ended up drunk. Even in AA, we always end up drunk. Could it be that powerful? Could it cloud our perceptions enough to make us think that all the problems in our life that are caused by the obsession have nothing to do with the obsession? Is it that powerful? Is it that cunning? Is it that baffling? Couldn't be. Could I actually be faced with something that is a *mega-motherfucker*? And I never had a clue what a

mega-motherfucker I was dealing with here? Is that possible? Nah, couldn't be. See why we don't wanna talk about it? Let's talk about Michael. Ha.

Andrea: Well, if you're anything like I was, it's more like... it's not like I can't listen to this and go, "Yeah, yeah I can see how that's possible, just not for me." And if anybody else is having that experience, I encourage you to cop to it, because I never thought I would drink again. Ever. Once I got into AA, I thought I was good. Good to go. I never thought I would drink again. I thought the way that I feel, no matter how shitty I feel emotionally, I don't want to drink. I don't want to drink, I don't want to drink. And I called it *the grace of God*. It turns out, that's what it is. When I heard stuff like this, I thought, that's probably true, but not for me. And what I learned is: That's the self-centeredness that keeps me from wanting to face that honestly. That that could be me. Not only could that be me, that's most likely gonna be me if I don't have a spiritual awakening.

Julie: That's my feeling. I think more than likely that I'm probably going to drink or use again before I die. I don't feel convinced that anything is gonna keep me sober for sure.

Michael: Cool.

Andrea: You have the opposite experience. It is a mega-motherfucker.

Michael: This is not some pimple on your emotional ass we're talking about.

[Laughter]

CD 5, Track 5: Spiritual Malady

Michael: Okay. Now, if you think of that in terms of drinking.... But you can look at it in terms of any of these things you're struggling with. But you gotta realize if you've got your life compartmentalized telling you that all these issues and things in your life have nothing to do with alcoholism, I'll tell you flat out you're wrong, and you're never gonna find a solution for any of it until *this* gets solved.

Michelle #2: If you have the obsession lifted, can you get it back?

Michael: Yes. All you gotta do is decide you want to try to live a selfish life safely again. All you have to do is start being dishonest. So yes, as we say in AA, we'll cheerfully refund your misery. The truth of *this* is why, in the Doctor's Opinion, when you read it fairly carefully, you're gonna see him use a word like *doomed*. See? The same person who seemed *doomed* to just live here until he either died, went to jail, was committed to an insane asylum suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol. That's the way the doctor put it. It's not quite accurate, but that was his observation. The main problem of the alcoholic exists in the mind. It's an obsession. We don't even know what an obsession is. We don't realize how powerful this is, how big this is, how deadly this is. And our experience in Alcoholics Anonymous is that way over ninety percent of us get drunk again. That's many. The vast majority of us don't ever realize how sick we really are. What we're trying to do here is solve a spiritual malady. That's the solution being offered to you. This isn't some airy-fairy sort of nearly kind of perhaps almost belief in God when you feel bad thing.

CD 5, Track 6: Without Defense Against the First Drink

Michael: So the main problem exists where?

Many: The mind.

Michael: Right here. So, now we've got a problem. Let's go to page 24. We'll get to your question earlier, Fred. Right at the top where it says, "At a certain point." Everybody there? "At a certain point in the drinking of every alcoholic, he passes into a state where the most powerful," what, "*desire to stop drinking is,*" what?

All: "Absolutely no avail."

Michael: That sounds like a contradiction to our third tradition, doesn't it? Third tradition in Alcoholics Anonymous is what?

Person #6: Requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Michael: Did everybody hear that? The only requirement for membership in Alcoholics Anonymous is what? A desire to stop drinking. But the book tells us that *that* desire to stop drinking is of absolutely no avail to you. It ain't gonna solve the problem. No matter how bad you want to be sober, it's of absolutely no avail. This thing called the obsession is more powerful than your desire. But desire is a human resource. It's a human power. So it's more powerful than one of your human powers. A real alcoholic who suffers from the obsession and at the same time has a desire to stop drinking is going to be in a battle. Will he win or will he lose? He will lose. It says, "This tragic situation has already arrived in practically every case," and you don't even know it. "Long before it is suspected." If you're a real alcoholic, this is not a recent development in your life. Now we get to the italics. "*The fact is....*" It doesn't say, "We *feel* that most alcoholics.... It's our feeling that...." It doesn't say, "You know, it could be that we surmised that most alcoholics...." No. It says, "*The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure,*" and we aren't even claiming we know why this is so, "*have lost*" what?

Many: "*The power of choice in drinking.*"

Michael: We're all coming out of treatment centers saying, "I'm choosing not to drink today." "*They have lost the power of choice in drinking.*" Do you think you have a choice? Now, notice it doesn't say that *you can't choose* there. It says that even though you do choose, it won't have any power. So you can go every day and choose not to drink. And maybe today it will work. And maybe tomorrow it will work. And it might work for a month or a year, in some cases five, ten, or fifteen, twenty years? Twenty-five. Thirty. Choosing, choosing, choosing. And then, *one day*. That's one of the things you can notice about the big-book. Every one of the relapse stories in the book starts off with the two words *one day*. *One day* is that thing that people who live *here* [not-drinking land] fear most. You want to live thirty years in fear of one day? Going through a whole lot of struggle and page 52 and that kind of stuff fearing that one day? And then *one day* it's gonna come. Because *one day* always comes in the life of every real alcoholic? So, uh-oh. We just lost another human power here. It's called *choice*. Desire – that's a human

power – and choice is a human power. In the battle with the obsession, you're gonna lose. Our so-called *will power* becomes practically non-existent. So we use our will-power over here in drinking land trying to control it, and that never works. And then we use our will-power over here in not-drinking land to stay sober, and that never works. So now we've got three human resources, or three human powers, and you can put them all together, and you still lose.

Person #6: What are the three?

Michael: So far, desire, choice, and will-power. Here goes another one. “*We are unable at certain times to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago.*” So there goes the AA cliché, “Just remember how bad it was, and that will keep me sober.” My book tells me that's not gonna work. And it's really true. I've been sober twenty-four years now. I *can* recall with some degree of clarity how much I loved booze and a lot of the really fun things that I did. See, I had a great time drinking a lot. There was a lot of crap that went with it, especially at the end and all that sort of stuff. But there were some great times drinking. I can recall that. But I have a great deal of difficulty trying to remember how shitty it was. And I've been sober a long time. Didn't you say you have been relapsing? Are you able to recall with sufficient force how bad it was? Nope. See. Isn't that interesting?

Julie: It's baffling.

Michael: Yeah. It is. Maybe you're not stupid or weak, maybe you're just suffering from something called an obsession here which prevents you from doing that. It's pretty interesting. So it says, “*We are without defense against the first drink.*” Absolutely powerless. So what do you gotta admit to yourself about that in terms of drinking if you don't have any defense against drinking?

Josh: Powerless.

Michael: Which means?

Josh: You have no control.

Michael: Which means? What are you gonna *do*?

Josh: Surrender.

Michael: No, what are you gonna *do* if you don't have a defense against drinking?

Some: Drink.

Michael: You're gonna drink! That's what step one is. Accepting all this. You gotta realize, you're gonna drink again. Whatever you've been up to, you're gonna do it again, and it's gonna get worse. Boils right down to that. If you jump out of an airplane without a parachute, you are in the grip of something stronger than yourself called gravity. Now you can choose all the way down not to hit the ground.

[Laughter]

Michael: Can't you? But your choice won't have any power, will it? You're gonna hit the ground. That's it. You're out of the airplane, and you're falling, and you're in the grip of gravity. If you're an alcoholic,

you're in the grip of a progressive disease. And you can choose not to relapse all you want, but sooner or later you will. Almost everybody does. There's nothing wrong with relapse, mom, everybody does it!

[Laughter]

Michael: There's even treatment centers talking that way now. “Relapse is a normal part of this. He failed and our treatment failed, but that's alright, give me another thirty grand, and we'll try again. If at first you don't succeed, pay, pay again.” Okay, one more. “*The almost certain consequences that follow taking even a glass of beer do not crowd into the –*” main problem of the alcoholic – “*mind to deter us.*” Well there goes the “think the drink through” defense. “*The almost certain consequences that follow taking even a glass of beer do not crowd into the mind to deter us. If these thoughts occur, they are hazy and readily supplanted,*” which means replaced, “*and the old threadbare idea that this time we shall handle ourselves like other people,*” meaning normally. We're gonna control and enjoy it, and it won't be so bad this time. All that sort of stuff. “*There's a complete failure of the kind of defense that keeps one from putting his hand on a hot stove.*” So let's think about that for a minute. How many of you have burned yourself on a stove at least once in your life. Do you have to go to twelve step meetings in order to cook dinner? Do you need a support group in order to eat, boil some water, cook some beans, fry an egg? Or is there some kind of defense going on that keeps you from putting your hand on a hot stove a second time? 'Cause you don't want to do that. No fear involved. There's no angst, there's no analysis, there's no will-power being used. There's nothing being used. It's just like a *knowing*. It's mostly not even conscious. You can be around a stove all you want. You can cook dinner even though you know it's very dangerous. Isn't that interesting? Wouldn't you like to have that kind of defense against alcohol? See, that's what the book is telling you. And if you want to see that in black-and-white, then you read page 82 and 83.

CD 5, Track 7: We have Ceased Fighting

Michael: It's 83 and 84. Last paragraph on page 84. “We have ceased fighting anything and anyone, even alcohol, for by this time sanity will have returned.” Remember step two? “We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally. We will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes.” That is the miracle of it – not you doing it, not your effort, 'cause you can't defend yourself. We're not fighting it. Neither are we avoiding temptation. “We feel as though we've been placed in a position of neutrality, safe and protected.” We've not even sworn off. We haven't even put the plug in the jug. Let's all read the next sentence together.

All: “Instead, the problem has been removed; it does not exist for us.”

Michael: The problem that brought you into Alcoholics Anonymous ceases to exist. Could that be? All of the things associated with that problem – could that be? It says, “We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience.” Not our theory or our guess or our wish or our dream. What is our experience? Would you like it to be your experience. That is how we react as long as we keep in fit spiritual condition. That's a big promise. If that was the only thing that ever happened to me.... As a

matter of fact, there was a guy up in Davis, California which is just west of Sacramento. He came knocking on the door one day. He had just gotten out of his umpteenth rehab. He said, "All I want is to be restored to sanity. That's it." You know what? He was. He helped a lot of people before he died. He died of liver damage due to his drinking. Eight years sober, he had a spiritual awakening, was a great guy. Big crowd of people at his funeral saying, "What a great guy he was." This guy was a slime-ball when he showed up. It was really cool.

CD 5, Track 8: Tribute

Michael: I'll tell you how cool it was. People with chronic liver problems, quite often you see them with their stomachs out to *here*. And he was like that when I met him. And the cirrhosis of the liver was never arrested, so he kept losing liver function, and he got down to right on the edge of life or death. And they told him he needed a liver transplant. He said, "Okay." And he went off to pray about that. He goes back to this team of doctors, and he says, "I want you guys to understand that I'm an alcoholic and a drug addict." And he said, "I'm responsible for the condition of my liver." And he said, "While I would like to live, I don't feel I deserve an organ that can save somebody else's life who's a better human being than I have been in my life. So you can put me on your list, but put me on the bottom. And if you run through everybody ahead of me and the liver matches me, I'll take it. But if it'll save somebody else's life, I want you to do that first." That's a pretty brave thing.

Person #5: Isn't that judging himself as bad and undeserving for being an alcoholic?

Michael: No. Not in my view. Maybe in yours. He's a very honest, humble, brave thing to do. But I realize there are other points of view possible. Just my view. Also, I knew the guy.

CD 5, Track 9: Human Power

Michael: What other human powers do you have other than the ones mentioned on page 24 in those paragraphs?

Josh: Therapy.

Fred: Reason.

Julie: Logic.

Michael: Can anybody name one that the obsession isn't more powerful than?

Andrea: Love.

Michael: Okay, so whatever love you possess. You think you can love yourself enough to keep yourself sober?

[Laughter]

Michael: It's interesting. Can you think of the human power or a sum total or some aggregate of human

powers that you can put together that is more powerful than this obsession? I can't, I couldn't.

Andrea: Death.

Michael: Yeah, and I'm not even so sure death solves the problem. I've heard people say that death and suicide are a long-term solution to a short-term problem. But I think it may be the other way around.

CD 5, Track 10: There is a Solution

Michael: Okay. Page 25. In italics, line four, it says, "*There is a solution.*" "A" in the sentence – third word in the sentence – is an article adjective denoting a number. What number?

Person: One.

Michael: One. See, on page 17 they said, "We have a way out upon which we can all agree." It's common solution. Wouldn't it be nice if we could all agree when we're talking to newcomers about what the solution is here? Instead of giving them a whole bunch of advice and opinions? The first thing they're gonna tell you about the solution is they didn't like it. "Almost none of us liked the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, and the confession of shortcomings which the process," meaning the twelve steps, "requires," that's called a *must*, "for its successful consummation." Consummation means ending or completion. So is it required that you like this? No. See, liking it is not required. What's required is honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness. Like? We don't care. Nobody cares how you feel about it, whether you like it, or any of that kind of stuff. This is just a matter of acceptance. Can you see the facts in your own life? Can you see the fire? Do you want to find the fire extinguisher? It's just pretty much that simple. "But we saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it." See, either drunk or sober. So you gotta look at your own life. If you just take these things in the book and read them sentence by sentence, and look at your own experience – have you come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of doing whatever you're doing that hasn't been working for you? Because if you haven't, you're gonna keep doing that. It's just pretty much that simple. Or you could ask yourself, the way you're thinking, the way you're behaving, whatever you're doing that's keeping you from recovering... is that hopeless, and is it futile? Futile means it never has worked, it isn't working today, and it's not gonna work in the future. See, you gotta look at your own experience. "When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved," recovered alcoholics, "there was nothing left," meaning no choice, "for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet." What do we call those? The twelve steps. "We have found much of heaven. We have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we have not even dreamed." Couldn't even imagine what it's like. I'm here to tell you, when I came to AA, I put the plug in the jug, I spent a year being sober. My number one goal was to be normal. [Inaudible] be who I was, but I wanted to have this normal life with the relationships and the jobs and the trucks and all that sort of stuff. To have a spiritual awakening does not make one normal. To be spiritually awake and walking around on the face of the earth isn't normal. So I never got my wish. I'm still not normal. As a matter of fact, there's a few people running around who will tell you, "This guy's not normal." And not because they like me. So here's the solution. You might draw a little circle around this or a square or put an arrow

or something, because this is it! It's the only solution offered to you by Alcoholics Anonymous. "The great fact is just this and nothing less." *Just this. Nothing less.* "We have had," past tense, "deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows, and toward God's universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our creator has entered into our" minds? No? Where? "Hearts. And *lives* in a way," that's a verb, "which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves." So here we've all been struggling with all this stuff that we've been talking about for two days here, and guess who solves the problem? So this is the real simple, cool part of this. Your job is not to fix your problems. Your job is to leave your problems alone. Whatever form they take. Your job is to find a spiritual experience. So the steps are not designed to let you solve your problems. They're for you to find a spiritual experience, and once you have that, God will solve your problems for you.

CD 5, Track 11: Your Job is to Find God

Michael: Okay, everybody get that?

Julie: No

Michael: Okay, our view of everything in AA has become therapeutic. And that means that we've gotta learn something or practice something or do something that's gonna work on our problems. Our experience is that doesn't work. Our problems don't go away. Correct? We can't solve our problems. We need to accept that. So whatever problems you got – if you've got core issues, cool. Whatever you got that has never been solved, you can't solve it. What the book says is that God will do for you what you cannot do for yourself. So what you need to do is find God. Once you find God, God will solve your problems. Still confusing to you?

Julie: A little bit just 'cause I feel like I have to be instrumental in doing certain actions that I am capable of doing. Not all the time, but certain times there are certain things I can do to make a situation better. Right?

Josh: I mean, I sure think that what you're saying is that without the spiritual experience, if I don't get it, I'm a dead man.

Michael: Okay. I'm gonna say it one more time. Your job is to find God. God's job is to solve your problems. Your job is not to solve your problems.

CD 5, Track 12: Consciousness of Your Belief

Deborah: I have a question about what you read. Can I ask you that now?

Michael: Sure.

Deborah: I heard this first on one of your tapes, and I never asked you about it. So, "The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our creator has entered into our hearts." And everyone except

you says *lives* [noun]. “Our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous.” And you say it means *lives* [verb]. There's a big difference in those two words.

Michael: Yeah! There sure is.

Josh: And you're sure it's *lives* [verb]?

Michael: Yes, I am.

[Laughter]

Deborah: How do we know that? How do we come to know that the way you know that?

Michael: Afterward.

Deborah: Oh.

Person #5: He had a séance where Bill and Bob came and told him, no, it's *lives* not *lives*!

Michael: It's experience.

Deborah: 'Cause it says, “The central fact of our *lives* [noun] today...” I was just always confused about that and I kept forgetting to ask, so there you go. That's the English language, too.

Michael: This may help, let's go over to 55. Second to last paragraph from the bottom where it says, “He can only clear the ground of it.” “If our testimony helps sweep away prejudice, enables you to think,” how?, “*honestly* and encourages you to search diligently,” where?, “*within yourself*, then your choice if you wish you can join us on the broad highway. With this attitude, you cannot fail.” That's one-hundred percent guarantee. What's the next sentence?

Deborah: *Consciousness* of your belief is sure to come to you.

Michael: That's how you know it's *lives* [verb]. See, it isn't any different than if you were talking to a precocious eleven-year-old about sex. You could explain sex to an eleven-year-old, pre-adolescent. And you could tell them whatever you want to tell them about it, be just as honest as you can be. And they're gonna go, “Okay. Okay.” Now they *know* about sex. And then like in a year or two through some kind of happening, they're gonna have this thing called an orgasm. And they're gonna go, “Oh!”

[Laughter]

Michael: “That's what you were talking about.”

Deborah: Okay, thank you for that illustration. Now I understand what you meant. *Consciousness* of your belief.

CD 5, Track 13: Defense Must Come from a Higher Power

Michael: Okay. Let's go back to chapter two, page 27. On the preceding page, page 26, they tell you a story of a guy named Rowland Hazard. Rowland Hazard was a business man. He came from a wealthy family. He was a hope-to-die drunk who had by no means lost everything. He's what a lot of people

would call a high-bottom drunk. He still had money, wife, all that stuff. He could travel; he had power in the world. But his drinking was getting to insane proportions. He ended up talking to Carl Jung who was the premier psychoanalyst psychiatric of the day. Carl Jung was over in Switzerland I think it was. So the story says that he spent a year undergoing analysis with Carl Jung. Carl Jung explained to him all about relapse and relapse triggers and his mind and how it worked and how he could avoid drinking again and the things that he would have to watch out for. In other words, he explained to him, he gave to him an understanding, and he taught him pretty much what normal people do with their human powers to solve problems. Those human powers that we learned over in page 24 don't work. This guy had a desire to stop drinking. So Carl Jung was talking to him about *that* and about his choice and the use of his will-power and his memory and all that sort of stuff. And Rowland Hazard, being a smart guy, he leaves, and he figures he's got it made, and in no time he was drunk. So he goes back to Carl Jung and he goes, "I don't know why I relapsed." And this is what Carl Jung had to tell him. Page 27. It says, "Some of our alcoholic readers may think they can do without spiritual help." What do they mean by spiritual help? The deep and effectual spiritual experience that we're talking about; that's the solution. "So let us tell you the rest of the conversation our friend," that's Rowland, "had with his doctor," that's Carl Jung. "The doctor said, 'You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. *I have never seen one single case recover.*'" Well wait a minute, that sounds like AIDS and multiple sclerosis, terminal cancer, those kinds of diseases that aren't curable. "I have never seen one single case recover where that state of mind," that cycle we've been talking about for two days, "existed to the extent that it does in you." Our friend felt as though the gates of hell had closed on him with a clang." So being a good alcoholic, he starts looking for the loophole. "He said to the doctor, 'Is there no exception?' 'Yes,' replied the doctor, 'there is. Exceptions to cases such as yours have been occurring since early times. Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences.'" The word vital means necessary to life – like a vital organ. "To me, these occurrences are a phenomenon." The word phenomenon – or phenomena, which is the plural – means something which you can see but you cannot explain. "They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements." Some of you have been having a few emotional displacements this weekend. That's good. "Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to once side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them. In fact, I have been trying to produce some such emotional rearrangement within you. With many individuals, the methods which I employ are successful." Why is that? Because psychiatry and psychology seem to work on normal people. They do. They enjoy some success with normal people. But they don't enjoy any success with alcoholics. Bodily and mentally different, page 30. "With many individuals, the methods which I employ are successful. But I have never," *never*, "been successful with an alcoholic of your description." Page 28. Top of the page. "Here was the terrible dilemma in which our friend found himself when he had the extraordinary experience, which as we have already told you, made him," what?

Many: "a free man."

Michael: There is a solution. Ask yourself, would you like to be a free man, a free woman? Or, do you like living on page 52 waiting for *one day*? "We, in our turn, sought the same escape with all the desperation of drowning men." So my friend down in Dallas calls it *the gift of desperation*. "What

seemed at first a flimsy reed, has proved to be,” God saying, *I'm gonna squash you like a bug.*

[Laughter]

Michael: “What seemed at first a flimsy reed has proved to be,” what, “the loving and powerful hand of God. A new life has been given of us or, if you prefer, a design for living that really works.” Let's go to the last page of chapter three, page 43 in my book. “Once more: The alcoholic....” Now everybody in here who thinks they might be an alcoholic, raise your hand. Keep you hand up, and let's all read the rest of this together.

All: “The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink. Except in a few rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a Higher Power.”