

POCKET POWER

H5905 .50

LONELINESS



Hazelden

First published March, 1986.

Copyright © 1986, Hazelden Foundation.
All rights reserved. No portion of this
publication may be reproduced in any manner
without the written permission of the
publisher.

ISBN: 0-89486-369-X

Printed in the United States of America.

Hazelden

Editor's Note:

Hazelden Educational Materials offers a variety of information on chemical dependency and related areas. Our publications do not necessarily represent Hazelden or its programs, nor do they officially speak for any Twelve Step organization.

LONELINESS

Loneliness is part of being human. No one is exempt. There are times when, no matter how strong our faith is, or how much spiritual or personal growth we've experienced, loneliness will flood our lives. The loss of a loved one, the critical illness of a child, making a tough decision, supporting an unpopular position, and sometimes just doing what we know to be right can isolate us from others in a painful and yet unavoidable way. Sometimes we can find no direct trigger for our feelings — we just feel disconnected from the flow of life around us.

We may be tempted to escape the discomfort by running to work, friends, or activities in the same way we used to run to chemicals. While this may provide some temporary relief, it usually increases our sense of isolation. As is true with any emotion, the attempt to deny or control the isolation will only give it more power. The willingness to experience what we are feeling often reduces the intensity of the feeling.

While few would consider loneliness enjoyable, it can encourage us to reach out to others, and to seek a power beyond. Calling our sponsor or a friend, getting to a meeting, and sharing our pain can help us get out of ourselves in a

healthy way. Reading recovery or inspirational literature may help us regain a sense of perspective. If we have suffered a major loss or are feeling grief, we may be able to find a support group which deals with that specific issue.

Many recovering people lead such busy and full lives that the feelings of loneliness may be coming from isolation from themselves. The solution might be to spend more time on ourselves. We may need to schedule daily time when we can center and work on our daily recovery program. We may be spending so much time and energy on work and service that we don't leave any quality time to spend with family and friends. We need to protect our mutually nurturing relationships by continuing to invest ourselves in them.

The paradoxical nature of loneliness is not new to recovering people. In our drinking and using days, we believed we were unique and beyond the understanding of mere mortals. Yet, we could not honestly let others know who we were, for we did not know ourselves. We would swing from a grandiosity that told us we were better than others to a deep sense of shame which made us feel unworthy of any relationships. We drove people away, felt rejected by them, and then rejected ourselves. While worshipping chemicals and believing they would

solve all our problems, we defiantly denied the existence of any Power greater than ourselves.

Our journey away from loneliness is equally filled with paradox. We learn we are neither perfect saints nor perfect sinners. We are simply human. Although we are capable of great wrongs, there is also a basic goodness in each of us. As we begin to accept ourselves and others, we discover it frequently is by sharing our weaknesses and vulnerability that we gain mutual understanding and connectedness. By sharing our powerlessness and brokenness with others, we are confronted with the need of a Power for good, for unity, for healing — a Power greater than our mutual selves — to restore us to a sense of belonging.

The Twelve Steps and the fellowship of recovery groups bring us into a relationship of harmony and connectedness with ourselves, others, and God. These relationships lead us from aloneness to solitude and from isolation to community. As we look at some of the ways in which this restoration occurs, we must keep in mind that it is not an either/or proposition. We cannot be reconciled with ourselves unless we are also working toward healthy relationships with others.

Ourselves. . .

For those of us for whom a complicated lie was easier than a simple truth, who kept secrets not only from others but from ourselves as well, or who lied to God and knew it and lied about knowing it, getting honest is a formidable task. However, to reach a point where we are comfortable being alone, we must come to know ourselves. We must replace our old lies of who we are and are not with some new, hard-fought-for truths. It is through working the inventory Steps that we begin to know who we really are.

The First Step tells us we are powerless and unmanageable. The Fourth Step shows us our strengths and weaknesses, our motives, feelings, and values. Many find it helpful to repeat the Fourth Step inventory periodically as we grow in honesty and as our insights change our understanding of our past.

A friend who had done her first Fourth Step at the end of her second year of sobriety had great difficulty finding her shortcomings as she sifted through an overwhelming amount of negative emotion from childhood: pain, loss, grief, and fear. In a later inventory, she was amazed to find a tremendous amount of love given and received in that same childhood. She realized much of the remembered loneliness was self-inflicted through her childish demands and self-

centeredness. She had believed others existed solely to meet her needs. Her efforts were rewarded with a new sense of healing of old memories as well as new freedom in her relationships today.

It may be helpful for us to do a special Fourth Step when loneliness becomes a problem. Do we have grief issues that are blocking intimacy? Were there some things we were unable to tell in our Fifth Step that are still fueling our sense of shame? When has loneliness been a problem in our lives before? What was happening in terms of situations and feelings? Can we see patterns emerging? What was our part in it? How can we use our program to work through this situation in a healthy way? What can we learn from it?

Recovery is slow, but as it continues we can see progress. In addition to admitting when we are wrong as we work our Tenth Step, we also need to admit our progress, to gratefully incorporate positive growth into ourselves. Sharing our developing understanding with a sponsor is a good way to reinforce our insights as well as to keep honest. Using a sponsor increases our sense of being okay, while being a sponsor increases our sense of usefulness.

Others. . .

We discover in recovery that we are not the self-sufficient creatures we once thought. For most of us, relearning how to establish satisfying relationships with others began at meetings. Our disease led us to a fellowship of people who understood and accepted us without reservation.

A friend tells of arriving at an A.A. meeting one night and being overcome by feelings of isolation and loneliness as he stood by the door watching the other members laughing and talking together. It was then that he knew, for the first time in his life, that he really belonged. This group of people was truly his family. Even if they ran away, he could run with them. He was not alone.

It is said that hearts are opened from the inside. For many of us in whom the sense of shame was so great that we were incapable of either venturing out to others or of receiving the warmth that was so freely offered, our hearts opened very slowly. It was in the environment of deep commitment to mutual recovery that we began to trust.

We are responsible for the hand of our recovery group to always be there, and that is a two-way responsibility for each of us. We must be willing to extend our hand to the newcomer, to

share our experience, strength, and hope.

We must remember that we, too, are always "newcomers" in that we have only a daily reprieve from our active disease. Where is our trust level today? Are we going to enough meetings? Are we bringing up our concerns when we get there? Are we still using our sponsor? Are we sharing our feelings of loneliness with others or is false pride keeping us in the role of "old-timer"? Unless we keep our group experience alive through active participation, it will become a memory which lacks the power to strengthen our lives today.

In order to extend to other relationships the feelings of comfort and connectedness we experience in the Fellowship, we must "practice these principles in all our affairs." We must bring that same openness and honesty, acceptance and trust, to our families and friends and into the workplace. What we learn about the human experience in recovery must become the basis of all our relationships. If we wish to feel connected to others, we must be willing to become vulnerable. We begin by making amends.

We may discover some real harm we have done in an active, concrete way or we may discover the harm came as a result of our unreasonable expectations or demands. We may have wanted others to have more power than humans

are capable of and solve our problems. We may have wanted them to let us act as the “fixers” and controllers of their lives. When things didn’t turn out the way we planned, we perhaps hurt both them and ourselves in our disappointment.

In making amends to others, we sometimes need to do a specific restitution, or give a verbal admission of wrong and an apology. Often, however, our amends must include a conscious amending of our view of the others. We come to a deep sense of relatedness when we can extend to all of the people in our lives the same right to be human, the same right to be wrong, that we extend to ourselves and to our recovering friends. The ability to acknowledge our common humanity, the ability to share our loneliness openly and honestly with another as a part of that common humanity, enables us to form true community.

God. . .

Few of us were on speaking terms with God when we first came into the Program. We might not have doubted that He could restore us to sanity, but feared He wouldn’t. Old understandings ranged from the “white-robed, candy store man in the sky,” somewhat passive and indulgent, to the “angry, punitive, arbitrary judge”

who accepts no excuses for not following the law to the letter. With few exceptions, “God as we understood Him” was not someone to whom we would want to turn over the care of our life and our will.

Most of us reached a point in sobriety when we could no longer remain “unconscious” in our contact with God. We had to bring the same rigorous honesty we found so vital with self and others into our relationship with our Higher Power. We came to believe that our unwillingness to share our feelings and our vulnerability blocks relationships with both God and man. We had to struggle with such questions as: Who is God as I understand Him? What is His action in my life? Is my understanding consistent with this action? What are my feelings regarding Him, positive and negative? Who am I in this relationship?

As sobriety continued, we came to believe that our very existence is a free gift from our Higher Power — not as we once “understood Him,” but as we have come to understand Him through the awareness of His action in our lives. When we are experiencing pain we often need to look at the lives of others, particularly those we sponsor, in order to see His action clearly. Few of us would have survived our drinking and using days without God’s aid.

We came to understand a God who is powerful, yet gentle. We came to understand a God who loves us just the way we are but too much to leave us that way. As our conscious contact with God develops, it has the power to transform our painful loneliness into joyful solitude.

It is through the Eleventh Step, the practice of prayer and meditation, that we maintain and improve our conscious contact with God.

To do this we must come to that relationship anew each day. We must be willing to let go of the old ideas of who God was yesterday in terms of our understanding, and search continually for who He is in our lives today. A conscious contact embraces not only the known, but also acknowledges the mystery and the unknown as well. We also need to bring to prayer a conscious awareness of who we are by beginning an evening session with “a constructive review of our day” as the *Big Book* suggests.

The simplest way of describing the difference between prayer and meditation is that prayer is speaking and meditation is listening. Any simple, spontaneous, honest sharing of who we are and how we feel about the God of our understanding is prayer. Perhaps we are most familiar with prayer formulas like The Lord’s Prayer and The Serenity Prayer. Yet the problem of unconsciousness can slip into these quite easily. A

helpful practice is to “journal” with our favorite prayer formula from time to time — to sit down and write the prayer out in our own words, or to go through each phrase to discover what we mean by the words we are saying. In using our daily meditation books, we might read a passage to see what words strike our hearts instead of reading with our intellect. Do these words have something special to say to us about our journey?

Meditation for most of us takes much practice, but it is worth the effort. Being quiet, particularly in times of stress, is unfamiliar to most of us. Bill W. speaks often of “walking to serenity,” and indeed a mile or so of walking can be meditation in itself as well as preparation for quiet time.

Finding a place with a comfortable chair and minimal stimulation is important. Many find soothing music aids in blocking out other internal and external distractions. Balancing the inhalation and exhalation of our breathing and gently, silently repeating a word such as “peace” or “love” are widely used techniques. For someone new to meditation, the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* offers some good suggestions in its discussion of the Eleventh Step. There are also many fine meditation guides available.

There are times when our attempts at prayer and meditation seem empty and unrewarding, and this can heighten our sense of loneliness. The “dark night” experience is common to all spiritual men and women. Someone described it as God’s unwillingness to allow us to become addicted to Him, as surely we would if we received nothing but peak experiences. The dry periods give us the opportunity to develop our faith and trust that He is with us even when we are not directly aware of His presence. They also give us a greater appreciation for the gift of prayer when it does flow freely.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to the practice of the Eleventh Step is forgetting to pray and meditate. Another problem is that some of us have difficulty in disciplining ourselves to set aside the time required. We allow other areas of our lives to invade our prayer time. We are frequently shy about discussing our prayers with others and fear we’re not doing it “right.” Although we can always improve and expand our prayer and meditation, most of us quite naturally discover what works best for us. As our consciousness of God deepens, we receive the promised sense of belonging. We are never alone.

It is the tradition of Twelve Step recovery groups to share stories and make suggestions. It

is hoped that these stories can be identified with and that some of the suggestions may be found helpful in seeking ways to deal with loneliness.

Loneliness is not an option. It may enter our lives for good reasons or for no reasons. So many of us are affected by it, yet we are often embarrassed to mention it. Perhaps we feel we should be doing better. The adage of “pain shared is halved” is true, but we sometimes forget. Keeping secrets prevents us from receiving the mixed blessing of loneliness: loneliness shared brings us into closer relationship with those with whom we share.

Pain acts as an effective catalyst for growth. It forces us to review and strengthen our recovery program. As is often said, “The program is simple, not easy.” Our experience is that walking through pain — with honesty, openness, and willingness — leads to new freedom and happiness.

May the loneliness you are now walking through bring you to greater awareness and acceptance of self, to deeper fellowship and intimacy with others, and to a growing experience of God’s presence and love in your life.

Hazelden

Hazelden Pocket Power Series

A series of inspirational pamphlets small enough to carry with you wherever you go. Short enough to read in one sitting, each pocket-size, 16 page pamphlet uses traditional A.A. philosophy to deal with the different stages and emotions encountered during recovery.

Accepting Criticism

Order No. 5366B

Forgiveness

Order No. 5364B

Freedom from Fear

Order No. 1282B

Gratitude

Order No. 1331B

Great Expectations

Order No. 5365B

Honesty

Order No. 1336B

Hope

Order No. 1337B

Humility

Order No. 1338B

Inadequacy

Order No. 5360B

Just for Today

Order No. 1339B

Loneliness

Order No. 5363B

Miracles in Recovery

Order No. 5402B

Patience

Order No. 5361B

Reaching Out to Others

Order No. 5400B

Serenity

Order No. 5362B

Surrender

Order No. 5449B

Pocket Power Collection (one each of the above)

Order No. 5900B

For price and order information, please call one of our
Customer Service Representatives.

Box 176, Pleasant Valley Road

Center City, MN 55012

(800) 328-9000 (Toll Free, U.S. Only)

(800) 257-0070 (Toll Free, MN Only)

(800) 328-0500 (Toll Free, Film and Video

Orders, U.S. Only)

(612) 257-4010 (Alaska and Outside U.S.)

Hazelden[®]
Educational Materials

Order No. 5363

ISBN: 0-89486-369-X