

Principles before Personalities

All of sobriety is putting the principle of abstinence from alcohol before our personalities as alcoholics.

We are people whose primary personality characteristic is to drink alcohol despite the problems it causes for ourselves and others. We are people whose previous preoccupation was getting around objections and obstacles to our drinking who now put our own sobriety before our drinking. This is a most clear example of principle before personality.

The personality one must put principles before is the craven part of our personality. Self obsessed, with a passion only for getting its own way, the willful driving part of our personality called, The Ego.

The Ego is very slippery. If it cannot get what it wants one way it searches out other means. It's not surprising that many alcoholics never do find the means to put sobriety before their ego driven will to drink or that alcoholics who do get sober, first become able when their lives are completely shattered by the experience of an alcoholic bottom. An experience, during which, the alcoholic's ego is stopped

The Ego is more slippery than stubborn. After being denied alcohol for a period of time it finds other preoccupations. In practice alcoholics are released from the obsession to drink but continue to struggle with self will.

The morality of Alcoholics Anonymous can be fully understood as the practice of putting principles before our ego driven self will. The Big Book is clear on this where it identifies "self" as the root of our troubles with alcohol and with life as recovering alcoholics.

Discussion of moral principle can easily turn into endless debate. It's fortunate that we can all agree that sobriety is a principle that can be practiced in a complete way. We are sober today and any complete period of abstinence for an alcoholic is an instance of principle before personality.

Other principles are more idealistic and cannot ever be practiced in a complete way but this type of principle can also be put before our ego driven personality. We can be honest with ourselves about people we have harmed. Ego admits to nothing. It will drive us to blame these people and convince us that we are the "real" victims. We may never be absolutely honest in all

things for all time to come but by placing the idealistic principle of honesty before our will to resent we make progress in maintaining our sobriety. Idealist principles are practiced by placing the principle, in this example honesty, before our ego driven will to deceive ourselves.

Principle and personality in this way of thinking about life are abstract concepts. Practicing the 12 Steps and doing the right thing when moral choices must be made are the practical realization of these concepts. Being honest with ourselves and others is one practical way we put a principle of the program before our self-willed personalities.

Idealistic principles are spiritual absolutes. Idealistic principles such as absolute honesty are conceptions of moral perfection; their perfection is part of what makes them such worthy goals. In their complete state they are Divine and no one but a Divine being could ever practice them in a complete sense.

We know idealistic principles cannot ever be practiced completely but we aspire to the goals they put in our path. We develop a moral sense that moves us towards these goals and this is our moral compass. These moral ideals guide us. We take our bearings from their influence within us. We chart our course towards them and right action becomes second nature as spiritual growth produces good human character in us.

We discover for ourselves the moral principles that will guide us by practicing the 12 Steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous program. During our moral inventory we sort out for ourselves what right and wrong mean to us. We learn who and what we are and can then treat people as we ourselves would wish to be treated. This Golden Rule morality enabled by the practice of the 12 Steps becomes a morality that can be applied to every situation we find ourselves in.

We put the moral principles we have learned and made our own to use by putting them before our ego driven self will. We falter often in this because we are human. We have the Tenth Step to practice when that happens. For so long as we keep our sobriety before our alcoholic will to drink we can patiently work on the rest of it. Our moral goals are not eternal life or Divine favor; they are to maintain physical sobriety, to improve our human character and to live better lives than we would have without sobriety and the principles of the Alcoholics Anonymous program.