

STEP ONE WORKSHEET: "THE DOCTOR'S OPINION"

William Duncan Silkworth, M.D., (1873-1951) was the Medical Director of the Charles B. Towns Hospital for drugs and Alcohol Addictions in New York City in the 1930's. Bill Wilson (A.A.), was admitted there three times for alcoholism. Silkworth had a profound influence on Wilson and encouraged him to realize that alcoholism was more than just an issue of moral weakness. He introduced Wilson to the idea that alcoholism had a pathological, disease-like basis. Dr. Silkworth explained to Bill that alcoholism was a twofold illness; a physical allergy and a mental obsession. This understanding that alcoholism was not a moral weakness nor a matter of will power was not only a key ingredient in the forming of Alcoholics Anonymous, but also led the medical community to later identify alcoholism as a primary, progressive, and fatal disease. William Silkworth authored the letters in "The Doctor's Opinion" in the book Alcoholics Anonymous.

Step One: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable

Spiritual Principle of Step One: Honesty

"We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all..."

(Pg. xxviii, Paragraph 1)

"They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks – drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over..."

(Pg. xxviii, Paragraph 4)

"All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving. This phenomenon, as we have suggested, may be the manifestation of an allergy which differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity. It has never been, by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence."

(pg. xxx, Paragraph 5)

Give that the phenomenon of craving only occurs when we ingested "alcohol in any form at all," identify three (3) examples of where you experienced the phenomenon of craving and three (3) consequences you experienced as a result of not being able to stop once you started.

Phenomenon of Craving:

1.

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- 2.
- 3.

Consequences from not being able to stop once started:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What additional negative impacts followed from these consequences?

Dr. Silkworth says that alcoholics have an allergy that "sets them apart as a distinct entity." What does he mean by the words "distinct entity?"

Do you see yourself in this group?

How do you feel about being a part of this group?

List any fears or reservations you may have.

Alcoholism has, according to the doctor, "*never been, by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence.*" (Pg. xxx, Paragraph 5).

How do you feel about entire abstinence being the only solution?

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List your fears and reservations.

Alcoholism is a disease that has been recognized by:

- The American Medical Association
- The American Psychiatric Association
- The World Health Organization

The AMA says that alcoholism is a primary, progressive, chronic and fatal disease. This confirms the idea in The Doctor's Opinion that we have a physical allergy, a symptom of which is the phenomenon of craving.

"These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve."
(Pg. xxviii, Paragraph 2)

"...they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks – drinks which they see others taking with impunity."
(Pg. xxviii, Paragraph 4)

Describe three (3) occasions where you were "restless, irritable and discontented," and sought escape or relief by drinking or using drugs.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

"Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by the alcohol. 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, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one."
(Pg. xxviii, Paragraph 4)

Did you like the effect of alcohol or mood altering substances? What did they do for you?

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How did this change for you over time?

Describe ways you could not differentiate the true from the false?

What parts of your alcoholic life (thoughts, behaviors and attitudes) seemed normal at the time, but now may not?

What parts of that life may be difficult for you to let go of?

"One feels that something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change."

(Pg. xxix paragraph 3)

"This is repeated over and over, and unless a person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery."

(Pg. xxix, Paragraph 1)

If human power, yours and others, is unable to relieve your alcoholism, can you accept that a "spiritual awakening" (Step 12) or "essential psychic" change may be your only hope?

Describe any fears and reservation you have about a spiritual solution.

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