

Candle for Peace, Hope & Justice

Sunday January 17, 2016

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Last time I shared in this church I touched on my burgeoning faith through the application of the 12 steps. As a recovering addict, I am encouraged to seek a relationship with a higher power, which in my opinion has saved my life. This is but one of five pillars of the programme. The other four are meetings, step work, sponsor and service.

The primary purpose of the programme is to help the still suffering addict. There's a saying in the recovery community: service keeps you clean.

The 12th step states that having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we try to carry this message to the still suffering addict and practice these principles in all our affairs.

For me, service began in the meetings. 12 step meetings are surprisingly well organised. Apart from the chairperson, there's a treasurer, a group representative, tea and coffee person, secretary, a librarian. There are business meetings at the end of the month where members vote in a new group of servers. I was initially surprised by how much work went on behind the scenes, and how members were only too happy to put in the extra time and effort to keep the doors open.

In early recovery I helped pack chairs at the end of meetings. I took on the tea and coffee position, talked to the newcomers. As the months progressed I began to see the benefits of giving back to the recovery community. I had responsibility, albeit menial at times. I was held accountable and it kept me coming back. Even Sharing at meetings is service, giving hope to the newcomer, who is of the utmost importance in any meeting. I began to have a sense of belonging; my actions were noticed and appreciated. Giving back kept me out of my head and away from my self-centred obsessions. No matter how small the service, I was making a difference. By helping others to stay clean, I began to grow spiritually.

Although service within the programme is all well and good, I need to carry this principle into all areas of my life. Before I came into recovery, service to others meant martyrdom. I put others needs ahead of my own for all the wrong reasons. If I was used, it was because I was needed and if I was needed, I wouldn't be abandoned.

I now appreciate I can only extend myself to care for others if I have taken care of myself first. Self-care has taken on a whole new meaning in recovery. I have learned healthy ways to look after my physical and emotional needs. I now love and respect myself. I've forgiven myself and have compassion where there was self-loathing. It's from this place that I can wholeheartedly be of service to others. I can be a shoulder to cry on for a friend in need, I get involved in charity work, or share my experience, strength and hope with a sponsor.

My whole outlook on life has changed through this process of recovery. I don't feel used, I feel useful. To give is to get. I am passionate about carrying the message of the life-changing and lifesaving power of the Twelve Steps. I have the chance to give back what was freely given to me. Service has kept me clean, but in more ways than one. Not only have I not had a drink or drug for over four years, I have a sense of serenity that comes from doing the next right thing for the right reason. I can recognise my spiritual growth when I am able to help others, granting me a higher purpose. I believe my higher power helps me grow when I give back. Today I realise what they say is true "we keep what we have only by giving it away."

The serenity prayer is chanted at every meeting, and I'd like to finish with what I call the coda serenity prayer.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change,  
courage to change the people I can  
and wisdom to know it's me.