

A Life of Purpose and Meaning

Right Living is the Key to Happiness

By Rick R.

I was a barroom drunk, and the lounge was my living room. The only reason that I went to my apartment was to shower and to sleep. In all my time in the bar, words like Humility and Ego were never the topic of conversation. As I look back on it now, I realize that the barroom was my place of refuge where I felt safe, and I could rationalize just about anything without ever facing the truth. I was living in a bubble of denial that would eventually run out of oxygen (options) and I would have to face life, for the alcoholic way of life is a dead-end street which leads to hospitals, prisons, or death. When I ran out of resources, facing desperation, I surrendered, and I entered the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) program where the denial was immediately replaced with hope and encouragement, and I got realistic about life. The obsession to drink was lifted and has never returned. The understanding of life did not happen overnight for I had to go through the process of *unlearning* of all my Ego driven fantasies and habits and replace them with unselfish values and principles that are common in AA as well as, in most of the meaningful philosophies and religions in the world today. My Ego has been the biggest obstacle in the way of this process, and I must never let down my guard. My Conscience now stands between my Ego and my Thoughts and Actions, and it is doing a pretty good job of it. It has been a slow process adopting these ideas and discarding the failed mentality of the past but, one by one, as I developed the strength and the trust in what I found in the program. I examine my motives for every decision I make, and I apply a proven, unselfish principle to those decisions. That takes most of the decision making out of my hands and I make less mistakes. As I continue to repeat this process, in time, it becomes second nature and replaces old behaviors that cause my discontent. Next, defining the word Humility was not an easy thing to do and it took a long time to settle on an understanding that put it to rest for me. The final piece of the puzzle came to me when, in my 22nd year of sobriety, I was on the phone with a man who was trying to engage me in an argument, and when he realized that I was not going to bite, he fired his last volley by saying: Well, I've heard stories about you, and you're no angel." I thought about it for a few seconds and replied, "*I've done a lot of things in my life that I'm not proud of, but I'm not ashamed of anything that I've done in the past 22 years.*" The phone call ended peacefully. Several years later, in a step study meeting on step seven the topic was Humility. I remembered that phone call and realized that Pride was not the opposite of humility, that *pride was the opposite of shame* and that *humility fell right in the middle of the two*. When I boiled it all down, I concluded that I should not be proud of, nor ashamed of the things I do and that I should be in the middle somewhere. This applies to my receiving as well as my giving. Aristotle referred to this as "The Golden Mean" where, for example, when we are in the habit of giving compliments to our friends when they deserve it, we should not be so stoic that we cannot accept a compliment with the proper amount of appreciation, when we deserve it. At the age of eighty-two, I am always involved in some form of service, and it gives Purpose to my life, and I plan to live to the age of one hundred and four, so I can't quit now. LOL