

# The Survival of the Saplings

## We Cease to Mature Emotionally

We hear so much about emotional sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) meetings, and I often wonder if the average member really understands where this all-fits in. Most normal people go through life by experiencing the *good and the bad and they end up with a life that is acceptable to them*. They do not seem to be plagued by the *things the alcoholics struggle with every day of their lives*. Most of the problems we face are caused by our *misguided instincts* when we let them far exceed their intended purpose. When these habits and behaviors are allowed to persist and the consequences of them are *masked by the using alcohol, we cease to mature emotionally*, and we spend much of our efforts, trying to rationalize these behaviors to the point that we start *believing our own lies*.

These things do not begin when we start drinking; they start in our formative years long before we ever touch a drop of alcohol. Our behavior when drinking appears to be more of a problem than the disease of alcoholism that causes them. The more we drink the more irresponsible we become as our disease progresses and the harder it is to explain these behaviors away. To the outside world, our drinking appears to be the problem, and we cannot deny that because drinking does become a problem, but it is not **the** problem. Our misguided instincts are the source of the problem. We finally surrender and show up in the A.A. meetings where we learn that *alcoholism stems from those deeper-rooted emotional problems*, and that we can live a somewhat normal life if we are willing to take the steps of the program, in their full implication, without any reservations. Yes, we can lead a somewhat normal life, but we can never be normal, if by normal we mean that we can drink like a normal person. We have lost our tolerance for alcohol and “The idea that we will ever regain control has to be smashed. We are like men who have lost their legs, they never grow new ones” (Ch.3 Alcoholics Anonymous). (Big Book) It is hard for the struggling alcoholic to accept these truths, but we must if we are to have any chance of being successful. We are damaged on the inside and that scarring never goes away. It can be overcome by practicing the principles of the A.A. program thoroughly, but it can only be arrested, *never cured*.

To explain this in simple terms, let us say that we plant a row of *saplings* along our driveway and shortly after they have taken root, one of them is trampled and bent over onto the ground. It may still survive if it receives water and nourishment. *If it is not straitened up immediately* and if it is *allowed to grow crooked*, it will still grow into an adult tree, but it will *never be strait like the other trees around it*. We can prune it, and trim it and decorate it, and make it look good, but *it will always be damaged*. Like that crooked sapling, our sobriety is contingent upon the maintenance of our *spiritual* condition. *We can live a life that is normal, and sometimes a much happier life than we would, had we not become an alcoholic* in the first place provided, we accept our condition and all its ramifications, and are willing to embrace the solutions that are set forth in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. As we cultivate this new, approach to life, we grow stronger than ever, and as I see it, *sometimes the crookedness of a tree is what gives it its character*. I hope I never get complacent about my spiritual development, and I hope I never stop growing.