

# Giving Guilt and Shame a Second Look

## The Difference Between Responsibility and Accountability

It's a marvelous thing to see a full-blown alcoholic stumble into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous, recognize the possibilities of the program, embrace them right from the beginning, turn his life around and find the peace of mind that he thought was unattainable. I've heard it said that A.A. is a simple program for complicated people and I have come to agree with that statement. Alcoholic are plagued with a multitude of ego driven mental dilemmas that keep them from achieving any level of peace of mind. Trying to deal with these issues before we understand them is, for the most part, ineffective. Until that person has formed a foundation in the program where they have accepted and embraced the principles that are suggested, and have atoned for their past behaviors, they may make some progress, but it does not necessarily relieve them of the mental turmoil that caused them to drink excessively in the first place. If we had no guilt or shame, why would we need to drink? I don't think I've ever met a person that came to A.A. with *high self esteem*. We all seem to arrive with a sack full of regrets. If we're honest with ourselves, we are riddled with guilt, and shame, and there seems to be no getting around it, *but there is a way*. The disease of alcoholism does not come to us by choice, unless we had the capacity to sign on to it at birth. It seems to come to us by *our conditioning prior to ever taking a drink*. Our first experience with alcohol does something for us that the normal drinker doesn't experience. We are not aware of this simply because we can't see inside the mind of the normal person. For him, the drink is a, so called, social lubricant, but for us, it's a major grease job. That seems to be due to our *mental conditioning from the day we were born* to the time we take that first drink. Regrets in the form of guilt and shame seem to be the most misunderstood ingredients in the mind of the alcoholic. The fallacy seems to be that he feels responsible for his condition (alcoholism) simply because of his behavior. If that were the case, he would have to have the capacity to abstain from drinking by his willpower alone but we know that's not the case. *The disease removes that choice. We are not responsible for becoming an alcoholic*, but once we know that we are smitten by the disease we become *accountable for our behavior, not only our behavior while drinking, but the habits and deeds before we ever took a drink*. The conditioning of our youthful years seems to be the root of the harmful behavior that we developed. The person who was conditioned in a way that was healthy didn't get that kind of relief simply because he didn't suffer the guilt and shame (and many other symptoms) that we did. With all of this in mind, the way to put the guilt and shame to rest, is to be diligent about all of the steps in the program and to be willing to stop the faulty behaviors as soon as you recognize them, and replace them with new, unselfish deeds and habits, long enough to establish a new track record over a period of time. I might suggest going through each day *that you can* without doing anything that you regret. Soon you will be able to say, "I've done a lot of things in my life that I'm not proud of, but I'm not ashamed of anything I've done in the last: (umpteen days, month, years or however much time). How many people do you know that can make a statement like that? *Atonement, restitution, unselfish principles and accountability* will replace that unexpected disease and put all of the guilt, shame and regrets into the recycle bin.