

Pain: The Touchstone of Spiritual Progress

By Rick R.

Touchstone (assaying tool), a mineral used to test the quality of precious metals.

In step ten in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12&12) it says, "*Someone who knew what He was talking about once remarked that pain is the touchstone of all spiritual progress.*" Then finishes the paragraph with, "How heartily we AA's can agree with him, for we know that *the pain of drinking had to come before sobriety, and emotional turmoil before serenity*". Can this mean that we can have no spiritual progress without suffering pain? It didn't seem to make sense, so I looked up the word "TOUCHSTONE" in the dictionary and discovered that a touchstone was a mineral that assayers used to test the purity of gold. Prior to that, I thought that it was synonymous with *steppingstone*. I'm sure that, in the recovery process, it seems that pain is the primary motivator for just about everything we do, and few of us would follow these principles if we didn't need to do them to live at peace with ourselves and with the world around us. I also believe that most of our spiritual growth is preceded by some form of discomfort or pain (if you like) but, *I also believe that spiritual growth can occur without pain as well*. I believe that we can grow spiritually through experience, education, and enlightenment, and we can ward off much of the potential distress before it happens. If it is true, as in the original Quote, that pain is a TOUCHSTONE, then what it is really saying that pain is testing *the quality of my Spirituality*. To me, that begs to question: How spiritual am I when things are not going my way? Do I trust the same Spiritual Principles that have served me so well when things are going right, or do I take a step backwards and take things back into my own hands again and resort to those tactics that I know will come back to bite me later? Most of the pain and discomfort that we talk about in A.A. was the result of the things that I regretted having done. Pain preceded the drinking and helped me to escape much of the shame and guilt for as long as I could sustain my drinking habit, and my drinking caused me to do many things that caused more pain. The drinking was the symptom of alcoholism. I believe I was an alcoholic before I ever took that first drink. The effect that it had on me was what determined that I was an alcoholic. The Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) and the 12&12 encompass the wisdom of the ages, and this is no exception. I just wanted to highlight a very important Quote that is often misinterpreted or can be interpreted in more than one way. Practicing these principles in all my affairs has been my goal for a very long time, and when I do find myself in pain, I hope I always pass the Assayer's test.