

Patching Holes or Bailing Water

Dealing with My Alcoholic Thinking

By Rick R.

I remember my early days of sobriety and how everything was bigger than life. I felt very *safe but vigilant* as I started to move through this process, with the help of several, more experienced members. I was somewhat naïve at the time, and I got my first dose of reality when my first sponsor showed up at the meeting drunk as a skunk. A week later, after he returned, he explained that everything was going fine, when he caught a cold and took a teaspoon of cough syrup, not knowing that it had alcohol in it, and he was off to the races as the obsession took over and, yada, yada, yada.

I was devastated, so I ran to another seasoned veteran in the program, Silent Bob, and asked him if it was that fragile; *was it that easy to have a slip?* Bob replied in his own way of saying things, pointing to his head, then to his stomach respectively, he replied, “You gotta get drunk up here before ya kin get drunk down there”. That explained it to me in words that I could understand. It is important to be vigilant, when it comes to abstaining from alcohol, when we are new in the program and if we embrace the principles that we learn here, *our vigilance will evolve into our thinking process*. For the most part, *relapse is not an accident*.

Most of the people that I know in AA speak of having drinking dreams when early in sobriety and this, I think, is normal. It happened to me as my mind had not been that far from those drinking experiences. As I put the bottle further and further into the past, they became less and less frequent, and now I cannot even remember when I last had one. My mind is not consumed with drinking activities now but is focused on healthy life experiences and I have put layer upon layer of vigilance between me and the thought of taking a first drink. Most people that relapse often say that the first thing that went wrong was that *they stopped going to meetings*. *I believe that what first happens is that meetings, in our minds, become less and less important to us. It starts with our thinking*.

If I get to the point in my mind where a drink starts to look good to me again it is a good sign that I am not convinced that I am powerless over alcohol and that it is going to be different this time. I need to deal with my alcoholic thinking. I cannot be judgmental about it when that happens to a person. *He or she may not be ready yet*. I can only be prepared to welcome him or her back when they return, *and always with an understanding heart*.

I have spent much of my life on or around the water, having been in the U.S Navy for over 20 years and later having owned several boats myself for fishing and water skiing, where I have seen many of those small aluminum boats. I picture one with a hundred little pin holes in its hull. A guy is fishing, and every so often, he stops to bail the water out of the bilge. As new holes appear the more time he spends bailing and less time fishing. These holes are like my defects of character and the water in the bilge are the shortcomings. My thinking comes before my actions. *My vigilance today is focused on the day-to-day issues of my life and my motives for how I handle those issues*. I can become willing to *patch those little holes, one at a time, or I can spend the rest of my life bailing water*, and risk sinking altogether. Today, my boat is high and dry, the fishing is great, and so is life.