

7 Using the Serenity Prayer

On the walls of thousands of A.A. meeting rooms, in any of a variety of languages, this invocation can be seen:

God grant me the serenity to accept
the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference.

A.A. did not originate it. Versions of it seem to have been used for centuries in various faiths, and it is now widely current outside A.A., as well as within the Fellowship. Whether we belong to this church or that, whether we are humanists, agnostics, or atheists, most of us have found these words a wonderful guide in getting sober, staying sober, and enjoying our sobriety. Whether we see the Serenity Prayer as an actual prayer or just as a fervent wish, it offers a simple prescription for a healthy emotional life.

We've put one thing right at the head of the list among "the things we cannot change": our alcoholism. No matter what we do, we know that tomorrow we won't suddenly be nonalcoholic—any more than we'll be ten years younger or six inches taller.

We couldn't change our alcoholism. But we didn't say meekly, "All right, I'm an alcoholic. Guess I'll just have to drink myself to death." There was something we *could* change. We didn't have to be drunk alcoholics. We could become sober alcoholics. Yes, that did take *courage*. And we needed a flash of *wisdom* to see that it was possible, that we could change ourselves.

For us, that was only the first, most obvious use for the Serenity Prayer. The further away we get from the last drink, the more beautiful and the more packed with meaning these few lines become. We can apply them to everyday situations, the kind we used to run away from, into the bottle.

By way of example: "I hate this job. Do I have to stick with it, or can I quit?" A little wisdom comes into play: "Well, if I do quit, the next few weeks or months may be rough, but if I have the guts to take it—the courage to change—I think I'll wind up in a better spot."

Or the answer may be: "Let's face it—this is no time for me to go job-hunting, not with a family to support. Besides, here I am six weeks sober, and my A.A. friends say I'd better not start making any drastic changes in my life just yet—better concentrate on not taking that first drink, and wait till I get my head straightened out. Okay, I can't change

the job right now. But maybe I can change my own attitude. Let's see. How can I learn to accept the job serenely?"

That word "serenity" looked like an impossible goal when we first saw the prayer. In fact, if serenity meant apathy, bitter resignation, or impassive endurance, then we didn't even want to aim at it. But we found that serenity meant no such thing. When it comes to us now, it is more as plain recognition—a clear-eyed, realistic way of seeing the world, accompanied by inner peace and strength. Serenity is like a gyroscope that lets us keep our balance no matter what turbulence swirls around us. And that *is* a state of mind worth aiming for.

8 Changing old routines

Certain set times, familiar places, and regular activities associated with drinking have been woven closely into the fabric of our lives. Like fatigue, hunger, loneliness, anger, and overelation, these old routines can prove to be traps dangerous to our sobriety.

When we first stopped drinking, many of us found it useful to look back at the habits surrounding our drinking and, whenever possible, to change a lot of the small things connected with drinking.

To illustrate: Many who used to begin the day with a morning drink now head for coffee in the kitchen. Some of us shifted the order of things we did to prepare for the day, such as eating before bathing and dressing, or vice versa. A change in brands of toothpaste and mouthwash (be careful about the alcohol content!) gave us a fresh, different taste to start out with. We tried a little exercise or a few quiet moments of contemplation or meditation before plunging into the day.

Many of us also learned to try a new route when we first left the house in the morning, *not* passing by a familiar watering hole. Some have switched from the car to a train, from the subway to a bicycle, from a bus to walking. Others joined a different car pool.

Whether our drinking was in the commuter bar car, the neighborhood gin mill, the kitchen, the country club, or the garage, each of us can spot pretty exactly his or her own favorite drinking locale. Whether we went on the occasional bender or were round-the-clock winesippers, each of us knows for himself or herself what days, hours, and occasions have most often been associated with our drinking.

When you want not to drink, it helps to shake up *all* those routines

and change the pieces around, we have found. Homemakers, for instance, say it helps to shift shopping times and places and rearrange the agenda of daily chores. Working people who used to sneak out for a drink on the coffee break now stay in and really have coffee or tea and a bun. (And that's a good time to call someone you know who's also off the sauce. During times when we used to drink, it's reassuring to talk to a person who has been through the same experiences.)

Those of us who began our sobriety while confined to a hospital or a jail tried to change our daily paths so we would not encounter the institution's bootlegger so often.

For some of us, lunchtime was usually an hour or two of liquid refreshment. When we first stop drinking, instead of going to the restaurant or steak house where the waiters or the bartender always knew what we wanted without being told, it makes good sense to head in a different direction for lunch, and it's especially helpful to eat with other nondrinkers. "Testing your willpower," in a matter involving health, seems pretty silly when it is not necessary. Instead, we try to make our new health habits as easy as possible.

For many of us, this has also meant forgoing, at least for a while, the company of our hard-drinking buddies. If they are true friends, they naturally are glad to see us take care of our health, and they respect our right to do whatever we want to do, just as we respect their right to drink if they choose. But we have learned to be wary of anyone who persists in urging us to drink again. Those who really love us, it seems, encourage our efforts to stay well.

At 5:00 p.m., or whenever the day's work is done, some of us learned to stop at a sandwich shop for a bite. Then we would take an unfamiliar route for walking home, one that did not lead past our old drinking haunts. If we were commuters, we did not ride in the bar car, and we got off the train at the other end—not near the friendly neighborhood tavern.

When we got home, instead of bringing out the ice cubes and glasses, we changed clothes, then brewed a pot of tea or took some fruit or vegetable juice, took a nap, or relaxed awhile in the shower or with a book or the newspaper. We learned to vary our diet to include foods not closely associated with alcohol. If imbibing and watching TV was our usual after-dinner routine, we found it helped to shift to another room and other activities. If we used to wait for the family to get to bed before hauling out the bottle, we tried going to bed earlier for a change, or taking a walk or reading or writing or playing chess.

Business trips, weekends and holidays, the golf course, baseball and football stadiums, card games, the old swimming pool, or the ski lodge often meant drinking for many of us. Boat people often spent summer days drinking on the bay or the lake. When we first stopped drinking,

we found it paid to plan a different kind of trip or holiday for a while. Trying to avoid taking a drink on a vessel loaded with beer drinkers, Tom Collins sippers, flask nippers, sangria lovers, or hot-buttered-rum guzzlers is much harder than simply going to other places and, for novelty's sake, doing new things that do not particularly remind us of drinking.

Suppose we were invited to the kind of cocktail party where the chief entertainment—or business—was drinking. What then? While drinking, we had been pretty skillful at dreaming up alibis, so we just applied that skill to devising a graceful way of saying, “No, thank you.” (For parties we really have to attend, we've worked out safe new routines, which are explained on page 64.)

In our early days of not drinking, did we get rid of all the booze around our homes? Yes and no.

Most successful nondrinkers agree that it is a sound precaution at first to get rid of whatever hidden stashes there may be—if we can find them. But opinions vary with regard to the bottles in the liquor cabinet or the wine rack.

Some of us insist that it was never the availability of the beverage that led us to drink, any more than the immediate *un*availability kept us from that drink we really wanted. So some ask: Why pour good Scotch down the drain or even give it away? We live in a drinking society, they say, and cannot avoid the presence of alcoholic beverages forever. Keep the supply on hand to serve when guests arrive, they suggest, and just learn to ignore it the rest of the time. For them, that worked.

A multitude of others among us point out that sometimes it was incredibly easy for us to take a drink on impulse, almost unconsciously, before we intended to. If no alcohol is handy, if we'd have to go out and buy it, we at least have a chance to recognize what we're about to do and can choose *not* to drink instead. Nondrinkers of this persuasion say they found it wiser to be safe than sorry! So they gave away their whole stock and kept none on the premises until their sobriety seemed to be in a fairly steady, stabilized state. Even now, they buy only enough for one evening's guests.

So take your pick. *You* know what your own drinking pattern has been and how you feel about sobriety today.

Now, most of the little changes in routine mentioned in this section may seem, by themselves, ridiculously trivial. However, we can assure you that the sum total of all such alterations in pattern has given many of us an astonishingly powerful propulsion toward newly vigorous health. You can have such a boost, too, if you want it.

9 Eating or drinking something—usually, sweet

Can you imagine drinking a bourbon and soda right after a chocolate malted? Or a beer on top of a piece of cake with icing?

If you're not too ill to read on, you will agree that they don't sound exactly made for each other.

In one way, that is what this portion of our experience is about. Many of us have learned that something sweet-tasting, or almost any nourishing food or snack, seems to dampen a bit the desire for a drink. So, from time to time, we remind each other never to get too hungry.

Maybe it's just imagination, but the yen for a shot does seem to be sharper when the stomach is empty. At least, it's more noticeable.

This booklet is based on our own personal experience, rather than on scientific reports. So we cannot explain precisely, in technical terms, why this should be so. We can only pass on the word that thousands of us—even many who said they had never liked sweets—have found that eating or drinking something sweet allays the urge to drink.

Since we are neither physicians nor nutrition experts, we cannot recommend that everybody carry a chocolate bar and nibble on it whenever the thought of a drink arises. Many of us do, but others have sound health reasons for avoiding sweets. However, fresh fruit and dietetic substitutes for sweet food and drink are available, and so the idea of using a sweet *taste* is practical for anyone.

Some of us think it is more than the taste that helps quell the impulse toward alcohol. It may also be, in part, just substituting a new set of physical actions: getting a soft drink, a glass of milk or fruit juice, and some cookies or some ice cream, then drinking or chewing, and swallowing.

Certainly, many alcoholics, when they first stop drinking, discover they are much more undernourished than they had suspected. (A condition that is encountered in all economic brackets.) For that reason, many of us are advised by our doctors to take vitamin supplements to treat deficiencies associated with alcoholism, repair damage, and avoid other consequences. So perhaps many of us simply need more nourishment than we realize, and any good food in the stomach really makes us feel better physiologically. A hamburger, honey, raw vegetables, roasted nuts, cheese, yogurt, sliced fruit, a mint — anything you like, that is good for you, can do the trick.

Newly sober alcoholics, when it is suggested they eat instead of drink, frequently wonder: What about getting too fat? We can point out that we see this occur only rarely. Many of us lose unnecessary fat when we start taking in wholesome food instead of the sheer calories

of ethyl alcohol, and others have gained needed pounds.

To be sure, a few ice cream or candy “addicts” do find in their first sober months a bulge or roll developing here and there, in the usual wrong places. But that seems a small price to pay for release from active alcoholism. Better to be chubby or pleasingly plump than drunk, right? Did you ever hear of anyone being arrested for “fat driving”?

Anyhow, with a little patience and sound judgment, the weight situation usually straightens itself out, our experience proves. If it does not, or if you have a chronic, serious obesity or underweight problem, you probably should consult a medical expert who not only knows weight problems, but also understands alcoholism. We never find any conflict between A.A. experience and sound medical advice given by a physician sophisticated about alcoholism.

So the next time the temptation to drink arises, let’s eat a little, or sip something gooey. At least, that puts off the drink for an hour or two, so we can take another step toward recovery... maybe the one suggested in the next section.

10 Making use of ‘telephone therapy’

When we were first trying to achieve sobriety, many of us found ourselves taking a drink without planning to. Sometimes, it seemed to happen practically without our knowing it. There was no conscious decision to drink, and there was no real thought about possible consequences. We had not intended to set off an entire drinking episode.

Now we have learned that simply postponing that first drink, putting something else in its place, provides us with a chance to *think* about our drinking history, to think about the disease of alcoholism, and to think about the probable results of starting to drink.

Fortunately, we can do more than just think about it, and we do. We telephone someone.

When we stopped drinking, we were told repeatedly to get A.A. people’s telephone numbers, and instead of drinking, to phone these people.

At first, the thought of telephoning a new acquaintance, someone we barely knew, seemed strange, and most of us were reluctant. But the A.A.’s—those with more nondrinking days behind them than we

had—kept suggesting it. They said they understood why we hesitated, because they had felt the same way. Nevertheless, they said, just *try* it, at least once.

And so, finally, thousands and thousands of us have. To our relief, it turned out to be an easy, pleasant experience. Best of all, it worked.

Maybe the quickest way to understand this, before you try it, is to put yourself mentally in the place of the person being called. It is a rewarding and gratifying thing to be trusted that much. So the person receiving the call is almost invariably nice, even charming, about it—not at all surprised, and even glad to hear from us.

There's more. Lots of us have found that when we wanted to drink, we could telephone someone more experienced in sobriety than we were, and it was not even necessary to mention that we were thinking of drinking. That was often understood, without a word. *And it really did not matter what time we called, day or nights!*

Sometimes, for no apparent reason, we found ourselves suddenly, inexplicably undergoing an onslaught of anxiety, fear, terror, even panic, which made no sense. (This happens to lots of human beings, of course, not just to alcoholics.)

When we told the truth about the way we really felt, what we were doing, and what we wanted to do, we found we were perfectly understood. We got total empathy—not sympathy. Everyone we called, remember, had been in exactly the same boat some time or other, and they all remembered, vividly.

More frequently than not, only a few moments of conversation made our thought of a drink disappear. Sometimes, we got practical, eyeopening information, or gentle, indirect guidance, or tough, direct, heart-to-heart advice. Sometimes, we found ourselves laughing.

Observers of recovered alcoholics have noticed the extensive network of informal social contacts among A.A. members, even when we are not at A.A. meetings, and often when no one is thinking or talking of drinking. We've found we can have about as much social life with each other as we want, doing together the usual things friends do—listening to music, chatting, going to plays and movies, eating together, camping and fishing, sight-seeing, or just visiting, in person or by note or telephone—all without the necessity of a single drink.

Such acquaintanceships and friendships have a unique value for those of us who choose not to drink. We are free to be ourselves among people who share our own concern for the maintenance of a happy sobriety, without being fanatically against all drinking.

It is possible, of course, to remain sober among people who are not

recovered alcoholics, and even among those who drink a lot, though we will probably feel some social discomfort in their company. But among other sober alcoholics, we can be sure that our recovery from alcoholism is highly prized and deeply understood. It means a lot to these friends, just as their health is cherished by us.

The transition to enjoyment of sobriety sometimes begins when, newly sober, we keep in touch with others equally new at the game. At first, it often seems a little awkward to strike up friendships with people who have been sober for years. We are usually more at ease with those who, like ourselves, are just setting out toward recovery. That's why many of us make our first telephone calls about not drinking to our A.A. "contemporaries."

"Telephone therapy" works even when we don't know any individual to call. Since a number for A.A. is listed in practically every telephone directory in the United States and Canada (and in many other countries), it is easy simply to dial that number and instantly be in touch with someone who honestly understands, at gut level. It may be a person we have never met, but the same genuine empathy is there. Reaching out through the Internet can also help, making a connection with another alcoholic in your own hometown or, perhaps, halfway around the world.

Once the first call is made, it is much, much easier to make another, when it is needed. Finally, the need to talk away the desire for a drink virtually disappears for most of us. When it does, many of us find, however, that we have established the beneficial habit of occasionally friendly telephone visits, so we keep them up because we enjoy them.

But that usually comes later. At first, "telephone therapy" is primarily for helping us stay sober. We reach for the phone instead of a drink. Even when we don't think it will work. Even when we don't want to.

11 Availing yourself of a sponsor

Not every A.A. member has had a sponsor. But thousands of us say we would not be alive were it not for the special friendship of one recovered alcoholic in the first months and years of our sobriety.

In the earliest days of A.A., the term "sponsor" was not in the A.A. jargon. Then a few hospitals in Akron, Ohio, and New York began to accept alcoholics (under that diagnosis) as patients—*if* a sober A.A.

member would agree to “sponsor” the sick man or woman. The sponsor took the patient to the hospital, visited him or her regularly, was present when the patient was discharged, and took the patient home and then to an A.A. meeting. At the meeting, the sponsor introduced the newcomer to other happily nondrinking alcoholics. All through the early months of recovery, the sponsor stood by, ready to answer questions or to listen whenever needed.

Sponsorship turned out to be such a good way to help people get established in A.A. that it has become a custom followed throughout the A.A. world, even when hospitalization is not necessary.

Often, the sponsor is the first person to call on a problem drinker who wants help—or the first recovered alcoholic to talk with the inquirer if he or she goes to an A.A. office—or the A.A. member volunteering to “sponsor” an alcoholic about to be released from a detox or rehab unit, a hospital, or a correctional facility.

At A.A. meetings, people often recommend that an A.A. beginner get a sponsor, and it is left up to the newcomer to pick someone as his or her sponsor, if one is wanted.

One reason it is a good idea to have a sponsor is that you have a friendly guide during those first days and weeks when A.A. seems strange and new, before you feel you know your own way about. Besides, a sponsor can spend far more time with you, and give you far more individual attention, than a busy professional helper possibly could. Sponsors make house calls, even at night.

If you do have a sponsor, some of the following suggestions may help. Remember, they are based on thousands of A.A. members’ experience over many, many years.

A. It’s usually better if men sponsor men and women sponsor women. This helps avoid the possibility of romance rearing its lovely head—a development which can hideously complicate, if not destroy, the sponsor-newcomer relationship. By trial and error, we’ve discovered that sex and sponsorship are a very bad mix.

B. Whether or not we like what our sponsor suggests (and sponsors can only suggest; they cannot make anybody do anything, or actually prevent any action), the fact is that the sponsor has been sober longer, knows pitfalls to avoid, and may be right.

C. An A.A. sponsor is not a professional caseworker or counselor of any sort. A sponsor is not someone to borrow money from, nor get clothes, jobs, or food from. A sponsor is not a medical expert, nor qual-

ified to give religious, legal, domestic, or psychiatric advice, although a good sponsor is usually willing to discuss such matters confidentially, and often can suggest where the appropriate professional assistance can be obtained.

A sponsor is simply a sober alcoholic who can help solve only one problem: how to stay sober. And the sponsor has only one tool to use—personal experience, not scientific wisdom.

Sponsors have *been* there, and they often have more concern, hope, compassion, and confidence for us than we have for ourselves. They certainly have had more experience. Remembering their own condition, they reach *out* to help, not down.

Someone has said alcoholics may be people who should never keep secrets about themselves, especially the guilty kind. Being open about ourselves helps prevent that, and can be a good antidote for any tendency toward excessive self-concern and self-consciousness. A good sponsor is someone we can confide in, get everything off our chests with.

D. It's agreeable when the sponsor is congenial, someone who shares our background and interests beyond sobriety. But it is not necessary. In many instances, the best sponsor is someone totally different. The most unlikely pairings of sponsor and newcomer sometimes work the best.

E. Sponsors, like most everyone else, are likely to have some family and job obligations. Although a sponsor will, on occasion, leave work or home to help a newcomer in a real bind, there are naturally times when the sponsor is truly out of reach.

Here is the opportunity for many of us to use our reawakening wits and figure out a substitute for a sponsor. If we genuinely desire help, we do not let a sponsor's illness, or momentary unavailability for any other reason, stop us from getting some help.

We can try to find a nearby A.A. meeting. We can read A.A. literature or something else we have found helpful. We can telephone other recovered alcoholics we have met, even if we don't know them very well. And we can telephone or visit the nearest A.A. office or clubroom for A.A. members.

Even if the only person we find to talk to is someone we have not met before, we're sure to encounter sincere interest and a desire to help in any A.A. member we reach. When we really level about our distress, true empathy is forthcoming. Sometimes, we get really needed encouragement from recovered alcoholics we do not much care for. Even if such a feeling is mutual, when one of us trying to stay sober asks any other recovered alcoholic to help us not drink, all petty and superficial differences melt away.

F. Some people think it a good idea to have more than one sponsor, so at least one is always likely to be available. This plan has one additional advantage, but also carries a slight risk.

The advantage is that three or four sponsors provide a wider range of experience and knowledge than any one person possibly can.

The risk in having several sponsors, rather than just one, lies in a tendency some of us developed during our drinking days. In order to protect ourselves and keep our drinking beyond criticism, we often told different tales to different people. We even learned how to manipulate people, in a sense, so the people-environment would practically condone, or even encourage, our drinking. We may not have been aware of this tendency, and it was usually lacking in any evil intent. But it really became a part of our personalities in our drinking days.

So a few of us with a clutch of sponsors have caught ourselves trying to play off one sponsor against another, telling one thing to the first, something else to the second. This doesn't always work, since sponsors are hard to kid. They catch on pretty fast to the tricks of anyone wanting to drink, having used almost all such wiles themselves. But sometimes we can keep at it until we get one sponsor to say something directly opposite to what another sponsor has said. Maybe we manage to wangle out of somebody what we *want* to hear, not what we need. Or, at least, we interpret this sponsor's words to suit our wishes.

Such behavior seems more a reflection of our illness than an honest search for help in getting well. We, the newcomers, are the ones most hurt when this happens. So maybe if we have a team of sponsors, it would be a good idea to keep one eye cocked sharply, alert to catch ourselves if we should find ourselves getting into games like that, instead of trying to progress straight toward our own recovery goal.

G. Being recovered alcoholics themselves, sponsors naturally have their own unique strengths—and foibles. The sponsor (or any other human being) without flaw or weakness hasn't turned up yet, as far as we know.

It is a rare occurrence, but it is possible that we can be misled or given a bum steer by a sponsor's mistaken advice. As we've all found by doing it ourselves, even with the best intentions, sponsors can goof.

You probably can guess what the next sentence will say.... *A sponsor's unfortunate behavior is no more a valid excuse for taking a drink than anything else is.* The hand that pours a drink down your throat is still your own.

Rather than blame the sponsor, we've found at least 30 other ways to stay away from a drink. Those 30 are laid out in the other sections of this booklet, of course.

H. You are under no obligation ever to repay your sponsor in any way for helping you. He or she does so because helping others helps us maintain our own sobriety. You are free to accept or reject help. If you accept it, you have no debt to repay.

Sponsors are kind—and tough—not for credit, and not because they like to “do good works.” A good sponsor is as much helped as the person being sponsored. You’ll find this to be true the first time you sponsor someone.

Some day, you may want to pass such help on to someone else. That’s the only thanks you need give.

I. Like a good parent, a wise sponsor can let the newcomer alone, when necessary; can let the newcomer make his or her own mistakes; can see the newcomer rejecting advice and still not get angry or feel spurned. A sharp sponsor tries hard to keep vanity and hurt feelings out of the way in sponsorship.

And the best sponsors are really delighted when the newcomer is able to step out past the stage of being sponsored. Not that we ever have to go it altogether alone. But the time does come when even a young bird must use its own wings and start its own family. Happy flying!

12 Getting plenty of rest

For at least three reasons, people who drink heavily often cannot realize how tired they are. The reasons are three characteristics of alcohol: (1) It is full of calories, which give instant energy; (2) it numbs the central nervous system, so that one cannot fully feel body discomfort; (3) after its anesthetic effect wears off, it produces agitation that *feels* like nervous energy.

After we stop drinking, the agitating effect may persist for a while, leading to jumpiness and insomnia. Or we may suddenly become aware of our fatigue and so feel worn-out and lethargic. Or the two conditions may alternate.

Either is a normal reaction that thousands of us have had at the very beginning of our sobriety, in degrees depending on our previous drinking and general state of health. Both wear off sooner or later and need not cause any alarm.

But it is very important to get plenty of rest when we stop drinking, because the notion of having a drink seems to arrive from nowhere with greater ease when we are tired.

Many of us have wondered why we suddenly feel like taking a drink, for no apparent reason. When we examine the situation, time after time we find that we are feeling exhausted and hadn't realized it. Chances are, we have used up too much energy and have not had enough rest. Generally, a snack of some kind or a little nap can change our feelings completely, and the idea of a drink vanishes. Even if we can't fall asleep, just a few minutes of lying down, or relaxing in a chair or a tub, take the edge off the fatigue.

It's even better, of course, to get our lives on a healthy schedule which permits a sufficient regular rest period every 24 hours.

Not all, but thousands of us can tell stories of insomnia spells after we quit drinking. Evidently, it takes a little while for the nervous system to learn (or usually to relearn) the habit of regular, undisturbed sleep without alcohol in the body. What may be the worst part of this is our worry about it, because the worrying makes it even harder to get to sleep.

The first advice we commonly give each other on this point is "Don't worry. Nobody has ever died of lack of sleep. When your body is tired enough, you'll sleep." And so it turns out.

Since insomnia was so often the excuse many of us gave ourselves for "needing a drink or two," we largely agree that a brand-new attitude toward insomnia helps in trying not to drink. Rather than toss and turn and fret about it, some of us give in to it, get up, and get some reading and writing done in the wee hours.

Meanwhile, it is a good idea to check out our other health habits to see whether we are in any way making sleep difficult for ourselves. Too much caffeine in the evenings? Are we eating properly? Getting enough of the right kind of exercise? Is the digestive system functioning properly yet? That may take some time.

Many simple, old-fashioned recipes for insomnia actually help, such as a glass of hot milk, deep breathing, a soak in a warm tub, a dull book, or some soft music. Some prefer more exotic gimmicks. One recovered alcoholic recommends heated ginger ale with pepper in it! (To each his or her own!) Others rely on a particular massage, yoga, or various remedies suggested in books on the subject.

Even if we do not fall asleep at once, we can rest by lying still with the eyes closed. Nobody goes to sleep pacing a room or talking all night over coffee.

If the condition persists, it may be advisable to check with a good physician who understands alcoholism well.

Because we know how dangerous sleeping medicines can be, some of us have had to put up with slight discomfort for a little while, until our bodies settled into a healthy sleep routine. Once we are past the temporary unease, when a natural sleep rhythm sets in, we can see that the price was eminently worth it.

One more curious item about sleep after we stop drinking may be useful. Long after we have weaned ourselves from the bottle, a great many of us are startled to awaken some morning or night realizing we have just had an all-too-vivid dream about drinking.

Not all of us have such dreams. But enough have for us to know that they are common, and harmless.

A.A. is not a program of dream interpretation, so we cannot point out the hidden meanings, if any, that such dreams have, as psychoanalysts and other dream interpreters do. We can report only that such dreams may occur, so don't be too surprised. Among the most common is a dream that one finds oneself drunk, and horrified about it, but has no memory at all of taking a drink. We may even awaken with chills, shakes, and other classic hangover jitters—when, of course, we haven't touched a drop in months. It was all just a bad dream. And it may come out of the blue, long, long after our last drink.

Probably, it's a good thing that we find ourselves shook up and miserable at the notion of drinking, even in a dream. Maybe this means we are really beginning to get the idea, deep down in our bones, that drinking is no good for us. Sobriety is better, even to dream about.

The beauty of sober sleep, once it is achieved, is the sheer pleasure of waking up—no real hangover, no worries about what may have happened in last night's blackout. Instead, it means facing the new day refreshed, hopeful, and grateful.

13 'First Things First'

Here's an old saying that has special, strong meaning for us. Simply stated, it is this: Above all other concerns, we must remember that we cannot drink. Not drinking is the first order of business for us, anywhere, any time, under any circumstances.

This is strictly a matter of survival for us. We have learned that alco-

holism is a killer disease, leading to death in a large number of ways. We prefer not to activate that disease by risking a drink.

Treatment of our condition, as the American Medical Association has noted, “primarily involves not taking a drink.” Our experience reinforces that prescription for therapy.

In practical, day-by-day matters, this means we must take whatever steps are necessary, at whatever inconvenience, *not* to drink.

Some have asked us, “Does this mean you rank sobriety ahead of family, job, and the opinion of friends?”

When we view alcoholism as the life-or-death matter it is, the answer is plain. If we do not save our health—our lives—then certainly we will have no family, no job, and no friends. If we value family, job, and friends, we must *first* save our own lives in order to cherish all three.

“First Things First” is rich in other meanings, too, which can be significant in combating our drinking problem. For instance, many of us have noticed that when we first stopped drinking, it seemed to take us longer to make up our minds than we liked. Decisions seemed to come hard—on again, then off again.

Now, indecisiveness is certainly not limited to recovering alcoholics, but perhaps it bothered us more than it would others. The newly sober homemaker could not figure out which of many cleanup jobs to do first. The businessman couldn’t decide whether to return those phone calls or dictate those letters. In many departments of our lives, we wanted to catch up on all the tasks and obligations we had been neglecting. Obviously, we couldn’t take care of them all at once.

So “First Things First” helped. If any of the choices before us involved drinking or not drinking, that decision deserved and got priority. Unless we held on to our sobriety, we knew, *no* cleaning would get done, no calls made, no letters written.

Then we used the same slogan in ordering our newfound sober time. We tried planning the day’s activities, arranging our tasks in order of importance, and never making the schedule too tight. We kept in mind another “first,” our general health, because we knew that getting overtired or skipping meals could be dangerous.

During active alcoholism, many of us led pretty disorganized lives, and the confusion often made us feel unsettled or even desperate. Learning not to drink is facilitated, we have discovered, by introducing some order into each day—but being realistic and keeping our plan flexible. The rhythm of our own special routine has a soothing effect, and an apt principle around which to organize some orderliness is—yes, “First Things First.”