

# The Doctor's Opinion

*Joe McQ. & Charlie P. · session 2 of 9*

---

---

## History of defining alcoholism: Trotter, Rush, and Dr. Silkworth

00:00

**Charlie** 00:00

And we've had medical people, spiritual people, throughout our history try to determine what alcoholism is. There was a doctor named Dr. Trotter that lived in England a long time ago. And he said that I believe alcoholism is an illness. But he couldn't explain what it was, therefore, they didn't have an answer for it. Good try. There was a doctor that lived here in the United States named Dr. Benjamin Rush. He's one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. He wrote a paper on alcoholism, described the alcoholic, and he said he felt it was an illness too, but he couldn't name what it was. He couldn't determine it, so he had no solution. It's only in this century that we have been able to find out what alcoholism is. And then once we found out what it is, then we could find a solution to it. You know, I don't think we alcoholics today who are in AA realize how lucky, lucky we really are to be living in the period of time when we found out what alcoholism is and we found out the solution to it. And as I look at our history, which we're going to be doing a lot of this weekend, I'm convinced in my mind that God got tired of seeing people like us die from alcoholism. And He took various different people from around the world and gave us these pieces of information that allows us to recover from that cognition today. And I think one of the first persons that he used was this little doctor called Dr. Silkworth. When Dr. Silkworth was in medical school, he became very interested in we alcoholics. But when he got out of medical school, he learned, like most doctors did, it was very difficult to make a living working with alcoholics. Most doctors do not like to work with alcoholics. They said then, and they say today, that an alcoholic will not tell you the truth. That's certainly true, isn't it? And they said they will not do what we tell them to do. And that's certainly true, isn't it? But they said the main reason we don't want to work with them is they won't pay their bills. So, Dr. Silkworth, in order to find a way to make a living, he had to go off into another field. But always interested in we alcoholics. And he became very successful in his field. But in the late 1920s, we had, of course, the great stock market crash. And Silkie had everything he owned invested in the stock market. And he lost it just like everybody else did, lost the good job he had. And he had to find a job somewhere. And Charlie Towns from the Towns Hospital, who Silkie had met before through his interest in alcoholics, offered him a job

and said, Why don't you come to work here? And I'll pay you \$30 a week in room and board. And you can help me in working with other alcoholics or working with alcoholics. So Silky went to work in the town hospital in 1930. And he began to work with people like us, and he began to see us come into the hospital, terrible, terrible physical, mental condition. And he began to withdraw us from alcohol, build the body up, and etc. And 60 or 30, 60, 90 days later, he would see us leave the hospital in reasonably good shape. And then a month or two or three or four later, he'd see us come back in in worse shape than we were before. Continually going in and out, in and out, in and out, in and out. He also noticed some people that he worked with who drank like we drank, but did not go in and out, and in and out, and in and out. He also noticed other people who drank moderately and safely. And he began to say, There's something different about these alcoholics. There's something different about the body. Apparently, alcohol does something to them that it doesn't do to normal people. And he began to develop this little idea that when you put alcohol in your body, it produces an actual physical craving that makes it impossible for us to stop drinking. But he also said, even in those days, that's not the real problem of the alcoholic. He said, the real problem is that the alcoholic cannot keep from drinking. He said, people who are heavy drinkers, people who are moderate drinkers, if they want to quit drinking, they just quit and it doesn't bother them at all. But he said, it seems as though the alcoholic, after they quit, the mind begins to play tricks on them and begins to think about one or two drinks and how it makes them feel. And he said, that idea becomes so powerful that it overcomes the idea that they can't drink and they take a drink and end up drunk every time. He said, Now, if you can't drink safely and if you can't keep from drinking, then you're powerless over alcohol. Now, we don't know whether Bill Wilson is the first one he told that to or not, but we know Bill is probably the first one to act on that information. Then, after Bill got sober, and after Dr. Bob got sober, and after Bill Dodson got sober, and after the first 40 got sober, based on that information and decided to write the book, they went to see Dr. Silkworth and said, Will you let us put that information in the book so that other alcoholics can see what their problem is too? And they said, Will you write some of it for us? And the doctor said, Yeah, you can use it, and I'll write some of it under one condition: that we will call it the doctor's opinion. He said, I can't prove it. There's no facts behind it, so we'll just have to call it an opinion. And he said, By the way, don't use my name. He said they'll throw me completely out of the medical profession if you use my name on this deal. In 1956, when he came out with the second edition, or 1955 and 1956, they came out with the second edition. By that time, the Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, had recognized the fact that alcoholism is an illness. And Dr. Silkworth said in the second edition, you can put my name in it now. So for the second and third, you've got Silkworth, but in here you don't. Let's look at what the doctor had to say for just a little bit.

## Reading the doctor's letter: body as abnormal as the mind

06:42

**Joe** 06:42

Let's go to Roman numeral page 24. That's XXIV. And I didn't know that when I got sober. He said, the physician who, our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement, he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture must believe that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind. Now, we know there's no must in the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, but there are a lot of musts in this book called Alcoholics Anonymous, and there's one of the first one. We must believe that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as the mind.

**Charlie** 07:25

Now, this is the first time we can find anywhere in written history a reference to the fact that the body is affected as well as the mind. Everything up until this time, they had talked about the mind only: weak will, moral character, sin, and etc. But here we say that, see a statement that says the body is quite as abnormal as the mind. I think he's telling us two things: that the body is affected, also, but I think he's also saying the mind is abnormal when it comes to alcohol. We react to it different physically and also mentally in an abnormal manner. And we'll talk about both of those. The first one we're going to look at is the body.

## The allergy theory makes sense of the alcoholic experience

08:13

**Joe** 08:13

It's did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality or were outright mental defectives. Now, these things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent, but some of these. But we're sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic, which leaves out this physical factor, is incomplete. The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinions to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say this explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account.

## Key word 'allergy': Charlie goes to the dictionary

08:53

**Charlie** 08:53

Now, if the purpose of a textbook is to transfer information from the mind of one human being through the written word to the mind of another human being. Then it stands to reason the

transference of that information is going to be based upon the understanding of the words that are used. If the writer of the book uses a certain word and understands it this way. The reader of the book reads that word and understands it this way, a different understanding. Then the information that comes through is going to be garbled and incomplete information. And there seems to be a few key words in the big book that many of us have had difficulty with. And I think the first word we've had a real problem with is this word allergy. You know, most of us, when we come here, we assume already we know what an allergy is. I know I did. And I know if you were allergic to something and you got around it, or you ate it, or you drank it, or something like that, that there would be some physical manifestation or indicator of that allergy. For instance, if you eat strawberries and you're allergic to them, you'll break out in a rash, the rash being the manifestation of that allergy. If you're allergic to milk and you drink it, you'll have a bad case of dysentery, the dysentery being the manifestation of that allergy. If you're allergic to certain plants, such as ragweeds, and you get around them, your eyes, nose, itch, water, and you start sneezing. The itchy, watery eyes, nose, and the sneezing, that's the manifestation of that allergy. So I knew if you were allergic to something, there would be something there that you could see. So they came to me and they said, Charlie, you've got an allergy to alcohol. You'll never be able to safely drink it again. And I said, How in the hell can I be allergic to alcohol? I'm drinking a quart a day. How can you possibly drink that much of something you're allergic to? And I said, besides that, when I drink alcohol, I don't break out in a rash, and I don't have a bad case of

**Charlie** 11:03

Once in a while I might, depending on what I'd been drinking, but usually I didn't. Nor did it make my eyes, nose itch, water, and caused me to sneeze. And I said, I don't understand what you're talking about. You need to explain that to me. And they said, well, you don't need to understand. They said, all you've got to know is you can't drink it. Well, today I think I know why they told me that. I don't think they understood it a bit better than I did. And I went from person to person to person to person, trying to get somebody to explain this allergy to me. And all they would say is: what difference does it make? Forget the damned allergy. Don't drink and you'll be all right. Keep coming to meetings. Now, if you're an alcoholic like I am, with a keen intellectual alcoholic mind, and you get a question like that dangling out here in front of you, if you don't get the answer to it, sooner or later it's going to drive you out of your mind. And one day, in sheer desperation, I went to a source of information that has never failed me since that time. I went to the dictionary and I looked up the word allergy and I found several different definitions of it, the way you do with any word, depending on how you use it. But I think I found the one that fit me exactly when it said an allergy is an abnormal reaction to any food, beverage, or substance of any kind, and an abnormal reaction. So I began to look back over my

drinking history to see where I was abnormal. And to my amazement, I found out I don't know what's normal and what's abnormal. The only thing I knew about drinking is the way I drank and the way those people drank who drank with me. And if they didn't drink like I did, we didn't drink together. So, to find out what's normal, to see if I'm abnormal, I have to go to the normal, social, temperate, moderate drinker. Those who drink alcohol and do not get in trouble with it. And I asked them to describe to me how they feel when they take a drink. And they said, well, we come home from work, tired, tense, wrought up from the day's work. We can have a couple of drinks before dinner. We begin to get a relaxing, comfortable feeling. We'll go ahead and have dinner, and we probably won't drink anymore that night. Well, I don't feel that way when I drink alcohol. Whenever I take a drink of alcohol, it passes over my lips. My lips begin to tingle immediately. Hits my teeth, and they kind of chatter up and down. Strikes my tongue, and I can feel it begin to grow and expand and swell. Hits my cheeks, and they kind of flutter in and out. At the same time, it's passing through my sinus cavities up into my forehead, and I begin to get a feeling up here in my forehead, which is absolutely indescribably wonderful. I hadn't even swallowed the damn stuff yet. I've just got it in my mouth. When I swallow that alcohol, it starts down through my esophagus. Great things begin to take place. The first thing that happens is my chest begins to grow and expand and gets bigger and bigger. Hits my stomach and just literally explodes like a bomb. Immediately, I feel it racing through my arms, and I get longer and longer. Hits my hands and fingers, and they begin to tingle and vibrate. Same time, it's racing through my arms, it's racing through my legs. They're getting longer and longer. I'm getting taller and taller, and it hits my feet and toes, and they get a hot, intense, burning, exciting, get up and go somewhere and do something feeling. I don't understand a comfortable, relaxing feeling when you have a drink. These people told me something that blew my mind for me. They said, Charlie, whenever we have a couple of drinks, we begin to experience a feeling of a feeling of dizziness, a feeling of being out of control. And they said, We don't like that feeling. Therefore, one or two drinks is all we want to drink. How many times have you and I tried to get them to drink more? And they say, oh, no, no, no, I feel this already. Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, this is making me dizzy. I don't want anymore. Well, today I realize that's the normal reaction to alcohol. You see, for most people, when they put alcohol in the system, it hits the stomach, it immediately goes into the bloodstream, immediately goes to the brain. And for a normal drinker, it acts as a downer. It's a sedative. It is supposed to give them a slightly tipsy, out-of-control feeling. Now, when it goes into my stomach, into my bloodstream, into my brain, instead of me getting a slightly tipsy out-of-control feeling, alcohol for me acts as an upper. It's a stimulant. And my brain gets a very exciting in-control feeling. They have two drinks and they want to go to bed. I have two drinks, and by God, I want to go to town immediately. I react to it differently mentally. And another thing they told me is that

when we have a couple of drinks, not only do we get a slightly tipsy out-of control feeling, they said we begin to experience a feeling of nausea. And they said we don't like that feeling. And therefore, one or two drinks is all we want to take. How many times have you tried to get them to drink more? And they say, oh, no, no, no, this is making me sick. I don't want any more of it. That's the normal reaction to alcohol. Alcohol is a toxic substance, a destroyer of human tissue. When you put it in your body, your mind and your body is supposed to react to it with nausea and say, puke it up and get it out of here. When I put it in my body, instead of my body experiences a feeding of nausea, my body experiences an actual physical craving which demands more of the same. Their body said, puke it up, mine said, put some more in here. So, not only do I react to it differently mentally, but I also react to it differently physically. Now, the only difference between normal and abnormal is what do the majority of the people do. If the majority, nine out of 10, react that way, 1 out of 10 reacts the way I do, then my reaction is considered to be abnormal, therefore I'm considered to be allergic to alcohol. You can't see it. You can only feel it. And only alcoholics feel it. You see, I kept looking for the rash, I kept looking for the dysentery. No, you don't see our allergy, you feel it, and only we alcoholics. feel it Joe.

---

## **Normal vs. abnormal reaction: alcohol as downer vs. upper**

13:00

**Joe** 17:39

Charles said you get in trouble going to town. You know, that's the trouble with trouble. It always starts off with fun, isn't it? How many of you ever went out to get drunk and to get into trouble? Now we go out and get drunk and have a little fun. And that's the trouble with trouble. It always starts out as fun. At least that's the way it did with me. So I'm going

---

## **Watching a normal drinker on the airplane**

17:57

**Charlie** 17:57

to go ahead. You know, I just love to watch normal, social, temperate, moderate drinkers. Fascinating to watch them. Saw one on the airplane yesterday. Yeah, he ordered a drink, got him a mixer with it, and he put his mixer in it, says a glass with ice in it, poured his little bottle in there. They buy a little bitty bottle on airplanes. I think it cost them \$4 today, and hell there's not a drink in that bottle, period. But anyhow, that's what they get. And he poured it in there, and then he took a little stick. And he went through a stirring ceremony. I don't know much about stirring when it comes to drinking, but he stirred and he stirred and he stirred. And after a while, he laid his little stick down. And you know what he did then? He picked up his

magazine and started reading his damn magazine. I'm sitting there watching him saying, drink the damn stuff. What the hell did you get it for? That's what we call alcohol abuse. Now that may be normal, but I call that sick to drink like that.

**Joe** 19:10

So I think I'll read this again. He said, the doctor's theory they have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinions to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But his explanation for problem drinkers, we can say that the explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account. And the explanation of this explains many things which I couldn't otherwise account. It explained to me why I would go down with a bar with every intention of having two. The next thing I know, it's midnight or one or two or three o'clock in the morning or the next day or the next week, and I wonder, well, what in the hell happened? I just went down there to drink too. Well, this idea about this allergy to alcohol interested me. It explained many things which I couldn't otherwise account. Now, let's go to Roman numeral page 26.

## **The phenomenon of craving and chronic alcoholism**

19:56

**Charlie** 19:56

A good textbook will never tell you anything to what it doesn't give you more information to back it up. He's talked here about the allergy. Now let's go over to Roman numeral 6 first paragraph. Let's expand on that just a little bit.

**Joe** 20:10

He said, We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholic is a manifestation of an allergy. I used to hate that word, and they called me chronic alcoholic. I hated it. Don't particularly like it today. But I found out too that chronic just means something that you do over and over and over. So, therefore, I was a chronic drinker or a chronic alcoholic. And it's a manifestation of analogy. And that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all, and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence to reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve. You know, this manifestation analogy that Charlie talked about, the phenomenon of craving. After we take a few drinks, we don't have the craving before we take a few drinks. It's only after we take a few drinks that the phenomenon of craving develops, and then we have to have more and more and more. And only alcoholics have that. Non-alcoholics do not crave alcohol after they take a

drink. They just don't. They get all they want to drink every time they drink, which is two or three, maybe. And that's all they want. Because they don't have this phenomenon of craving that alcoholics have.

**Charlie** 21:30

The action of strawberries on one who's allergic to strawberries is manifested by a rash. The action of milk on one who's allergic to milk is manifested by dysentery. The action of ragweeds on one who is allergic to ragweeds is manifested by itchy, watery eyes, sneezing, and etc. The action of alcohol on one who is allergic to alcohol is manifested by, and he refers to it as the phenomenon of craving. He uses the word phenomenon because he didn't understand it. So, what it is, it's manifested by an actual physical craving in the body that demands more of the same after we've once started. And the word craving is very, very important. You know, I hear people today say, well, I came to AA and I craved a drink for four years. No, in the context of the big book, that's the wrong use of the word craving. They might have needed to drink, wanted to drink, desired a drink. The only way an alcoholic can crave alcohol is to first put it in the body. Then the physical craving develops, and then we can't stop and we end up drunk. So, in the recovery section of the book, when you see the word craving, it's always referring to the body, never to the mind. We'll use the word obsession for the mind. The word craving is for the body. Now, he goes on a little further over on Roman numeral 28, and he talks about five different kinds of drinkers. Then he drives this idea of the phenomenon of craving home being an allergy one more time. Let's look at these five drinkers.

## **Silkworth's five types of drinkers; 'type five'**

23:24

**Joe** 23:24

He said, the classification of alcoholics is this on Roman numeral page 28. The classification of alcoholics seems most difficult, and in much detail, it is outside the scope of this book. He said, There are, of course, the psychopaths who are emotionally unstable. We're all familiar with this type. They're always going on the wagon for keeps, and they are over-remorseful and make many resolutions, but never a decision. We call that type one. There is a type of man who is unwilling to admit that he cannot take a drink. He plans various ways of drinking. He changes his brand or his environment. That's type 2. There is a type who always believes that after being entirely free from alcohol for a period of time, he can take a drink without danger. Type 3. There is a manic depressive type who is perhaps the least understood by his friends and about whom a whole chapter could be written. That's type four. I always thought I was the next one, type five. Then there are types entirely normal in every respect, except in the effect alcohol has upon them. They're often able, intelligent, friendly people. God, I liked that. Wasn't

**Charlie** 24:25

great. Any more type fives in the room tonight? Yeah, a whole bunch of you. Now he makes his point one more time. All these and many others have one symptom in common. They cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving. This phenomenon, as we have suggested, may be the manifestation of an allergy which differentiates these people and sets them apart as a distinct entity. It has never been, by any treatment which we are familiar permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence. Now, I think what he said is this: that if all we alcoholics in this room tonight should take a drink, God forbid that happened. But if we did, we would not all react just exactly the same. And just a little bit, one of us would be crying in our beer: oh, boo-hoo-hoo-hoo, the world's not treating me right. And just a little bit, one of them will be up here on this stage hooping and hollering and dancing and cutting up and having a hell of a good time. And just a little bit, there'll be two over in that corner getting in a fight, just sure as anything. Look over here? There'll be a couple, one putting the make on the other. We tend to do that too when we drink. We would do many different things, but if we're a real alcoholic, there's one thing that every one of us would do. We would start looking for a second drink. The phenomenon of craving has taken over now. The allergy has manifested itself, and now when we can't stop, we've got to have a third drink. And the fourth, and the fifth, and the sixth, and the eighth, and the tenth, and on and on, till we're drunk, sick, and in all kinds of trouble. Now, it really doesn't make any difference whether we're born with it or whether we drink ourselves into it. I was born with it, I'm sure. The first drink I took at age 14, the allergy presented itself that night, and I got drunk. Every time I drank, I got drunk. I drank 26 years. I don't ever remember taking one drink of anything that had alcohol in it. It always led to 2 to 3 to 6 to 8 to 10, and etc. Some of you, I'm sure, drank with safety for several years. But somewhere you crossed the line. And the same thing began to happen to you after several years of drinking that happened to me from the very beginning. But what difference does it make? The fact is, that's the way we are tonight. I know that's the way we are tonight, too. Because if we were not that way tonight, we wouldn't be in this room tonight. If you and I could drink without getting drunk, where would we be? We'd be out there drinking without getting drunk. But you see, we can't do that. That's what we've got in common in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous: we can't drink without getting drunk. Now, back in the 1930s, this was the doctor's opinion. In the 1930s, they knew very little about metabolism. Today they know lots about metabolism. Today they know that if you put anything in your system, such as a piece of bread or a piece of beefsteak, that the mind and body recognizes what that is. Certain organs of the body begin to produce some things called

enzymes. They attack that food and begin to break it down and separate it into usable and non-usable items. What the body can use, such as the proteins, the amino acids, the vitamins, the body will retain. What it can't use, it will dissipate through the urinary and intestinal tract. They call that metabolism. Today, they have proven that the doctor's opinion is no longer just an opinion, it's actual truth. Now, we're going to look at a little picture here for just a minute. And I want to stress that this is not AA information. AA won't get involved into why we're allergic because that might bring controversy. But this information presented to us a few years ago by members of the medical profession. It's so interesting and has such depth and meaning for people like us, I think we would be remiss if we didn't look at it. So let's look at it for just a moment. In the center of that picture, there's nine people there that drink safely. They are at ease with alcohol. They take a drink or two, the mind and body senses it, the enzyme production starts, and the enzymes attacks the alcohol, breaks it down into acetaldehyde, then to diacetic acid, then to acetone. In the final stages it becomes a simple carbohydrate made up of water, sugar, and carbon dioxide. The water will be dissipated through the urinary intestinal tract. The sugar is calories, energy. Empty calories. None of the amino acids, none of the vitamins. The body will burn them, store the excess as fat to be used at a later date. The carbon dioxide will be dissipated through the lungs. In the normal social drinker, this takes place at the rate of approximately one ounce per hour. Now I know it'll vary with different people, but the average is one ounce per hour. And if they don't drink more than an ounce per hour, they can't get drunk. Their body metabolizes it and burns it up and gets rid of it at that rate. Very seldom do you see a social drinker drinking more than an ounce per hour. If you're with one of them and they're drinking more than an ounce per hour, you better get out of the way. Because they're going to puke on you after a while. They'll either go to sleep or they'll puke on you, one of the two every time. The left-hand side is the one who does not drink safely. Or is that disease with alcohol? And if you want to use the word disease, that's all it means: something that separates you from the norm. We alcoholics put it in our body, the same thing happens. The enzymes attack the alcohol, break it down to acetaldehyde, then to diacetic acid, then to acetone. It seems as though, in our bodies, the enzymes necessary to complete the metabolism, breaking it down from acetone to the simple carbohydrate, are not there in the same qualities and/or quantities as they are in the body of the non-alcoholic. Therefore, it stays in our body for a longer period of time as acetone. It is proven today that acetone ingested into the human system that remains there for an appreciable period of time will produce an actual physical craving for more of the same. The non-alcoholic's body, it goes through that stage so rapidly, the craving never occurs. In our body, it stays there long enough, the craving develops, and that demands a second drink. Now, just think: you got most of the acetone from the first, now you put that in from the second. The acetone level goes up. And if the acetone is what causes the

craving, then the craving becomes harder with the second drink. Now you put in the third. You got most of the first, nearly all the second, now you put in the acetone from the third, and the craving goes up. And that demands a fourth. You got most of the first, nearly all the second, that from the third, now you put in the acetone from the fourth, and as the acetone level increases, the craving becomes harder. At midnight, we're laying out in the parking lot. They've run over us and broken our leg, and they come running up to us and say, Can we help you? And we say, My God, yes, give me another drink. You see, we're craving it harder at midnight after 30 drinks than we were at six in the evening after two drinks. That explains to me, why I never got enough. Hell, I drank 26 years. I never did get all the alcohol I wanted. I got a hell of a lot more than I needed, more than I could stand, but I never got all I wanted. Because the more you drink, the higher the craving, the higher the craving, the more you want, the more you want, it's just endless. Now, if this never got any worse, we could probably learn to live with this situation. But we know not only do we have an illness, we have a progressive illness that always gets worse and never better. Today we know that as we drink, the more we drink, the longer we drink, the more tissue we destroy. Alcohol is a destroyer of human tissue. And the more tissue we destroy, it seems as though that it acts upon two organs of the body first, which are the liver and the pancreas. Now, today we know that the organs of the body that produce the enzymes necessary to metabolize alcohol are the liver and the pancreas. And as we drink and as we damage them, the enzyme production becomes less and less. The craving becomes harder and harder, with the resultant drinking becoming worse and worse. We know also that the body begins to shut down on the production of everything as we get older. Now, I wish that were not true, but believe me, it is. I'm experiencing lots of that. If I should take a drink today after 20 some odd years of sobriety, I wouldn't start where I left off 20 some odd years ago. The craving would be harder, the drinking would be harder, and the resultant trouble would be harder due to the aging factor. So, not only do we have a physical illness, we have a progressive physical illness due to two factors: damage to the body and also due to the aging factor. Now that I see that, I can accept the fact that I can no longer successfully drink alcohol. Until I could see this, I knew there had to be a way I could drink without getting drunk. And I damn near kill me trying to find it. But now that I can see this, I can accept the fact that I can no longer safely drink alcohol. Now, if that's all that was wrong with me. And if that's all was wrong with you, we would pass the hat, get up, and go home, and never have to go to another AA meeting. But you see, that's just half of my problem. The other half is right up here in my head. If I never took the first drink, this allergy couldn't hurt me. I have a friend who is allergic to all things fish. Every time he eats fish, his throat swells up. He almost chokes to death. But that's not his problem. The fact that he's allergic to fish is beside the point because if he doesn't eat fish, that can't happen to him. But he's got something up here in his head that isn't right when it comes

to fish. The switch doesn't close, or a light bulb doesn't come on, or something. He's three French fries short of a happy meal. Yeah. From time to time, his mind tells him that it's okay to eat fish. And he'll eat the fish. His throat swells up. He ends up in a hospital every time. And I'll bet it always starts like this. Well, I haven't had any fish in 90 days. Surely I could have one piece of

## **The fish allergy analogy: the problem in the mind**

35:46

**Charlie** 35:46

It says it's that orange ruffly I've eaten. If I'd eat nothing but halibut, it'd be okay. It might even say it's them damn people I've been eating fish with. If I just change my crowd, whatever the reason his mind gives him permission to do so. Now, in the same way, when it comes to alcohol, left on my own resources, from time to time, my mind tells me it's okay to drink alcohol. Then I take the drink, and then the allergy takes over. So, the real problem centers in my mind rather than my body. Let's look at the mind for just a few minutes and then

## **The obsession of the mind: drinking for the effect**

36:23

**Joe** 36:23

we'll be through for the night. Charlie said the doctor said he has never been by any treatment with which we are familiar permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is that the entire abstinence. In other words, if we have an allergy to alcohol and we crave more when we drink, he suggests we don't drink. And that's the end of that. So now we're going to talk about the most dangerous part of the illness. And the most dangerous part of the illness of alcoholism is when we're not drinking. You know why it's the most dangerous part of the illness? Because we're thinking about drinking. So let's move back now to the Roman numeral page 26, and we're going to start talking about the mind, two-fold illness. We talked about the physical allergy in great detail. Now we're going to talk about the obsession of the mind. It's in bottom page, Roman New, page 26. It says, Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol.

**Charlie** 37:15

Now, many alcoholics are highly offended when you say that. They say, No, that's not the reason I drink. They say the reason I drink is because I love the taste of alcohol. I wouldn't argue with them whether they do or not. I love the taste of cold beer. I always have all my life as far back as I can remember. I also love the taste of cold Mountain Spring Water. I never did sit down and drink a case of Cold Mountain Spring Water. You see, that beer did something for me

that that spring water didn't do. All my life as a kid growing up, I was on the outside of the crowd looking in. Always wanting to be a part of, I knew I could not be. Always knew that whatever I said, whatever I did, it would be the wrong thing, people would laugh and I would be embarrassed. You ladies, I couldn't even get around you. If I got around you, I would just absolutely, completely tongue-tied you. You scared me to death. One night, somebody gave me a drink of moonshine whiskey, and all those fears disappeared. And I was allowed to ask a girl to dance with me for the first time in my life. I was allowed to take her home from the dance for the first time in my life. We got in the back seat of a 36 Chevrolet, and I was allowed to do some things I'd been wanting to do for a long, long time. I loved what alcohol did to me, for me. Not to me, but for me. Now, if it gave me a slightly tipsy, out-of-control beginnings of a nauseous feeling, I wouldn't love that. But you see, it gives me that great, exciting, in-control feeling and allows me to function in a manner I've never been able to function before. Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol.

**Joe** 39:05

I think the way that we can all pretty well identify with that effect in the beginning. I certainly had that same effect and drank it for the same reasons. But we know that alcoholism is a progressive illness, too. It gets worse over time. And after a while, I begin to do some of those things that Charlie talked about, and I began to drink more and more and more, and I began to wake up some mornings with a little guilt, shame, and remorse as a result of things that I was doing while drinking, and that brought on more drinking, and I had to drink to get rid of those feelings. So, another effect by which I drank. And as the years and time went by, and the trouble that I had in my life went by, in the end, I drank for the sickest effect of all, which is total oblivion. There's only one thing wrong with oblivion, though, isn't there? You wake up, then you've got to start doing it again. So there are many, many effects by which we drink, and it progressively gets worse. And he said, the sensation is so elusive that while they admit it is injurious, they can, after a time, differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one, and I couldn't recognize the true from the false because my alcoholic life had become normal to me. Everywhere I went, alcohol was involved. Every bar that I went to, they drank like that the way I did in that bar. I didn't go to those bars. That's what I was doing down there at the zebra lounge. And one time, I remember I woke up one morning and had a clear thought. And I looked over at my wife, Phyllis, and I said, Phyllis, do you realize that most people don't drink like we do? And you know what she said? I don't talk this way. This is what she said. She said, bullshit. That's just what she said. Everybody we know drinks just like we do. You know, I thought, oh, that's true. So, my alcoholic life had become normal. The abnormal had become normal, and I couldn't hardly tell the true from the false in that

**Charlie** 40:58

light. Now, he begins to describe how people like us feel whenever we're sober, in forced periods of sobriety.

## **Restless, irritable, discontented; the failure of willpower**

41:08

**Joe** 41:08

He said, To them, they're alcoholic, excuse me, they are restless, irritable, and discontented. Put a few little words in there too. It says we're full of guilt, shame, and remorse. And remember, you know, when we first got sober, we were new, they said if we didn't drink, we were going to feel better. Well, you're going to feel better, all right. You're going to feel resentment better, you're going to feel anger better, you're going to feel a lot of things

**Charlie** 41:29

better. Running around, feeling lousy as hell, wanting to feel better, knowing only one way to feel better. We begin to think about what one or two drinks will do for us. We don't think about what 20 drinks will do or 30.

**Joe** 41:49

We think about what one or two will do for us. Unless they can again experience a sense and ease of comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks, drinks which they see others taking with impunity, and impunity simply means that those people are drinking and seemingly they don't have any problems. And after they have succumbed to desire again to submit to, after we've finally given in and taken a couple of drinks, and then the phenomenal craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful with a firm resolution not to drink again. And how many times have I done that? How many times have you done that? Come off of one of those big drunks and long extended period drunks and promise them and yourself and anybody that will listen, I'll never do it again. I'm through. I promise you, I'm through. And those of you who've made those promises, you know that we were sincere and we meant that. He said, This is repeated over and over and over and over. And unless this person can experience an entire psychic change, there's very little hope for his recovery. So he'll quit talking about the body now. He's talking about the psychic change, the mind. Later on in our book, the psychic change is going to be described as a spiritual experience, a spiritual awakening, a personality change, all four words meaning the same thing, a psychic change. There's very little hope for its recovery. So the change is going to have to become here in the mind.

**Charlie** 43:09

Let's look at this picture up here again for just a moment. Over here on this side, we could see that because of the allergy, we can no longer safely drink alcohol. But as we said before, that's not going to bother us if we don't take the first drink. So apparently, the problem is going to be over on this side. The real problem centers in the mind, telling us we can drink, rather than in the body that ensures that we can't drink. Well, the doctor told us then, and they tell us today, there's nothing that can be done for that. So the only possible means of recovery would be to find a way to live where our mind doesn't tell us it's okay to drink. And we're dealing here with our emotions. We're dealing here with the way we think. We're dealing here with the way that we feel whenever we're sober. We are very, very complex human beings. Not only are we complex physically, but we also are complex mentally too. And all people experience emotions. All people experience from time to time anger, resentment, fear, worry, depression, excitement, elation, guilt, remorse. These are all emotions that all human beings have. Now, somewhere back in our lifetime, as we begin to experience those emotions as we grow up, we start seeking a solution to them. And like me, when I was that kid growing up, I was just an emotional basket case. Couldn't hardly function in normal society. Always scared to death, always worried, always angry, always doing things that I shouldn't do and feeling the guilt and the remorse associated with that. Now I used to think only that we only we alcoholics did that. But I found out today that that's normal. As kids grow up, everybody experiences these kinds of feelings. And they start looking for an answer, and many people find it in many different ways. Some people find that when they don't feel good emotionally, that they can go out here and start working, and the excess work seems to make them feel better. Some people find that when they're emotionally fouled up, they can eat certain foods, and that seems to make them feel better. Some people find that when they're emotionally disturbed, if they can just get really involved deeper and deeper into sexuality. That makes them feel better. And some people find that there's establishments like this building that if you're emotionally disturbed, you can do a little gambling, and that makes you feel better. Now, it doesn't make any difference what you find that makes you feel better. When you find a solution to that emotional problem, your mind has a memory bank. It immediately records the solution. And the reason it does that is the next time you have that emotional problem, you don't have to go looking for a solution. Your mind feeds it back to you. Well, a little gambling made me feel better, or that food made me feel better, or that work made me feel better, whatever. Now, that's called mental addiction. And everybody has that. You know, we become mentally addicted to certain types of automobiles. We become mentally addicted to our hairdressers. We become mentally addicted to certain dishwasher products that we use. This soap, you know, we've got a problem, we find the answer, the mind records it, feeds it back to us the next time we have the problem. As a kid growing up,

I had that emotional problem. And one night somebody gave me that drink of moonshine whiskey, and immediately those f problems disappeared. And that great, exciting, uncontrolled feeling came over me. And I was allowed to ask that girl to dance, take her home, and get in the back seat of that 36 Chevrolet. It answered my problem that night. My mind immediately recorded what it did for me. The next time I got into a solution where I didn't feel right, things were not right, my mind said, if you could find a drink, you'd feel better. And I found a drink of whiskey, and God, the magic happened the second time. In other words, alcohol became the solution to my emotional problems. Now, if I had been non-alcoholic and that worked for me, that would have been great. But I also had that physical allergy over there on that side. And when I had the problem and I used the solution, it it sure enough made me feel better, but also it triggered the allergy, and I would drink more than I intended to drink, and I would end up drunk. And I would repeat that cycle over and over and over and over and over again. The mind causing me to drink, the allergy causing me to get drunk. The emotions, after coming off the drunk, to feed the mind, caused me to drink. And the drink then would trigger the allergy, and as time went by, it got worse and worse and worse because this is a progressive illness. The drinking would become harder and harder, the trouble would become more and more, the restlessness, irritability, guilt, remorse became more and more. The emotions became worse and worse to trigger the idea of taking the first drink. The mind destroying the body, and the body destroy it. Now, somewhere down the line, I said to myself one day, Charlie, you're going to have to do something about your drinking. Now, I didn't say you're going to quit drinking. I said, you're going to have to do something about your drinking. So the first thing we alcoholics do to do something about our drinking is we decide we're going to control our drinking while drinking. Tonight we're just going to have two beers. We're just going to have two drinks. Go to the liquor store and buy a half a pint because nobody can get drunk on a half a pint. And I spent three or four or five, six years trying to control my drinking while drinking. Anyone in here ever try to control your drinking while drinking? Well, now I can see why that would not work because of the allergy. Now, after four, five, six years of trying to control my drinking while drinking, I said to myself one day, Charlie, I don't believe you can drink anymore. It took me a long time to realize it. But I said, I don't believe you can drink anymore. So, what do we alcoholics do when we finally decide we can't drink anymore? We trot out the most useful tool we have. We put it right there, and it's called willpower. And we say, sick of them, will we're through with that drink, and we'll never take another drink as long as we live. Now, believe me, you people that are non-alcoholic. When we say we're going to quit drinking, that is exactly what we intend to do. You see, we are strong-will people. We can use our willpower to handle all other problems, and we assume that we can use willpower here, and we really intend to quit drinking. Now, as the days went by, I haven't done anything about my emotions, by the way. I'll

just quit drinking. And as the days go by, these emotions begin to build up: the fear, the guilt, the remorse, the shame, the worry, the depression becomes worse and worse. That's not the big things in life that kill us. It's the things that all people have to go through on a daily basis in life is getting up every damn morning and going to work. It's a bitching wife, it's a griping husband, it's screaming kids, it's burnt bacon, it's broken shoestrings, it's flat tires, all the things that everybody has to go through, and these emotions start building up. Now, after a while, the mind says, A drink would make you feel better. But remember, I put willpower in here, and Wilpower said,, No, sir we're not going to drink. We've quit. And that day we don't drink. The next day, the emotions are still here, and they're building up a little higher, and a little higher, and a little higher, and it said, Gotta drink and make me feel good. And the mind said, No, sir, we've quit drinking. We ain't never gonna drink again. The next day, the emotions are still here, and they're building up a little higher, and a little higher. And the mind begins to say, Well, hell, you've been sober 90 days. You've proven you're not an alcoholic. One drink wouldn't hurt anybody. And the mind said, No, we're not going to do that. We've quit drinking. Hell, we've sworn off we'll never take another drink The next day the emotions are still here and they're building up higher and higher And the mind said By golly, anybody who's been sober ninety two days owes themselves a drink. And we begin to think about that great, exciting, uncontrolled feeling that comes with one or two drinks. We begin to think about the sense of ease and comfort, as Dr. Silkworth talks about here. And as we begin to think about what alcohol is going to do for us, it begins to push out the idea of what it does to us. And we begin to forget the jailhouse. We forget the last car wreck. We forget the divorce courts and the hospitalization. And the mind begins to key in on one thing and one thing only: what it's going to do for us. Then, when the desire to drink comes, the willpower is no longer there. Because you see, the only time willpower is there is when the mind sees something wrong with what it wants to do, and just before we drink, we don't see anything wrong with drinking. Willpower becomes non-existent. We take the drink, we trigger the allergy, we go through the well-known stages of a spree, we emerge remorseful with a firm resolution not to do this again. And we repeat that cycle over and over and over. The mind, the body destroying the body over here, the mind over here causing us to drink more and more. And if you can't safely drink because of the body, and if you can't quit because of the mind, then you've become absolutely powerless over alcohol. And that's our problem. Now, if you're going to solve a problem, you've got to be able to attack it somewhere. I can't attack it over here. Can't do nothing about that. Maybe I can attack it over here. If I could find a way to live where I could be sober and not be restless, irritable, and discontented. If I could find a way to live where I could be sober and not be filled with shame, fear, guilt, and remorse, just maybe I could find a way to live where I could have peace of mind, serenity, and happiness. Maybe I could find a way to live where I could be sober

and have that great sense of ease and comfort that comes at once by taking a couple of drinks. Maybe I could find a way to live where I don't need to take a drink in order to make me feel better. And that's called recovery. As we use our program, as we go through the steps, these kinds of feelings down here begin to disappear. And they begin to be replaced with peace of mind, serenity, and happiness. And under those conditions, our emotions do not build up to the level that suggests we take a drink to feel better because we already feel better. That's what the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous do for us. Fellowship alone will not bring that about. The program will. Let's read the very next statement in the big book.

## **The psychic change and the Twelve Steps as the solution**

---

56:25

**Joe** 56:25

And he says, on the other hand, and strange as this may seem to those who do not understand. Once the psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol. The only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules. And as Charlie said, those few simple rules are the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. And our book says that the 12 and 12, if practiced as a way of life, will accept, will expel the obsession to drink and make the person happily and usefully whole, and that is called recovery. And that's exactly what the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anomalies is all about.