

Eleventh Step Visioning

“Sought through prayer and meditation to increase our conscious contact with God, as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out”

“I have been driven many times to my knees by the conviction that I had nowhere else to go.” Abraham Lincoln

The truth of growing up in alcoholic or dysfunctional families and situations:

Many parents actually were trying to be helpful, however poorly, by being critical and domineering. Telling us we were lazy, sloppy, or worse could have been a poor attempt to improve our situation. Their involvement could have ranged from loving guidance and relative freedom to outright abuse or neglect and oppressive micro management. Your parents may have considered you their property and so free to dictate every aspect of your life as a reflection of themselves. This of course would be extremely stifling and oppressive for the free spirit children naturally have.

Some may have had so little control over their own lives they jumped at the chance to some area of life over which they had complete control, namely you! There is unfortunately no required training or testing required to have children. Also many pregnancies are accidental and the parents completely unwilling and unprepared. Many parents have very dysfunctional, addicted, or unstable lives before they have children, and the extra pressure only exacerbates an already bad situation. Our parents are likely to have many, all or more of the character defects we do. Exhibiting behaviors from their past wounds, they may have at times sadly been trying to even the score for injustices from decades past.

Our parents may have foolishly trusted sick, dysfunctional family, friends, even strangers to have access to us in very vulnerable situations, allowing them many opportunities to physically, emotionally, sexually or otherwise abuse us. They may have also been struggling financially, with health problems, or in social upheavals, as we now see across the world. These illustrations are meant help us find clarity and understanding of how we and our family members suffered, perhaps going back for generations, in order to arouse forgiveness and compassion for ourselves and them. It is not meant to in any way to minimize or deny the damage done. The time has come for healing, for us, and through us.

How we perceive our Higher Power, our Inner Child, and our Inner Parent has a huge effect on how we consciously or unconsciously create the vision for our life. If we come from a dysfunctional family background, our vision for our life is often dysfunctional as well, and may come from fear of lack, fear of being hurt or used, and fear of not being good enough. We may be afraid to ask for, or hope for happiness, contentment, or success (don't ask). We may not trust that if we ask we will receive anything good, or we will be criticized or punished (don't trust). We may feel we are not worthy of love so why risk being vulnerable, or told our feelings were not valid (don't feel). We learn to turn our vision of our life over to our Higher Power through using the twelve step tools, and cultivate awareness of how we perceive our world. With Higher Power's help and our growing insight, we open wide to manifestation of positive outcomes. We make room for dreams and possibilities previously denied by ourselves or others.

We grew up in families where we knew something was wrong but we were powerless to change it. You may have heard the term “goat trails” in reference to hoarders. Houses become so full of useless items or acquisitions and trash that there is very little room left to live in the home, with only narrow dangerous paths through the dwelling. Critical inner parent is like living in a house with Goat trails. We are forced on specific paths surrounded by clutter and dangers. We may know its dysfunctional, and that other people don't live like this, or think it is normal because that is all we have ever seen. We want to clean it up and live like normal people but our “parents” won't allow it. The parents say it's good enough for me, it's good enough for you. This is being forced to stay in the family disease.

As a child you might have tried to make space in your life where you felt safe, in a home where your parents made all the rules. Those rules may have been overly restrictive, unhealthy or barely sane, and they became the goat trails that the wounded inner child incorporated as a way of navigation through life. It wasn't effective but it was familiar. With Higher Power's help and through visioning, we gradually clean up the and baggage of dysfunction and insanity of our former lives. We tell the Critical Inner Parent that this is our life now and we will be responsible for it, and that they must step aside and be quiet, and that they have no power here. This is the province of our Loving Higher Power.

I think of an Inner Loving Parent as the one who carefully puts our first bicycle together, making sure it is safe for us to ride, being certain the training wheels are set up properly. This is the parent who explains the steps of learning to ride a bicycle; how to balance and peddle and steer all at the same time, and also how to use the brakes so that we can stop if we are afraid. When the training wheels come off, this parent holds onto the back of the saddle with a strength that gives us confidence as well as support, and trots alongside until we are doing well. When they do let go of us they make sure we are in a safe area.

The Critical Inner Parent is the one who doesn't put the training wheels on, doesn't teach us how to balance, steer or brake, and gives a shove down a hill into oncoming traffic. We can learn to replace the Critical Parent with the Loving Parent. We can use visioning exercises to re-imagine our Inner Child being parented with kindness and gentleness from our infant onward to young adult, even to present day. How would a loving parent support us even now through compassion and wisdom?

Five Steps of Transformation:

1 Awareness is the first step to help us pause, rather than react, and acknowledge our feelings. We may discover that we feel irritated, annoyed, upset, uneasy, doubtful, confused, or ill and not know why. If we go too long without checking in, we often find ourselves filled with suffering, sorrow, obsession, attachment, fear, compulsion, denial, anger, hate, rage, violence, and so on. This is also the first of the twelve steps where we can use awareness to break the "Don't feel" rule.

2 Mindfulness is the second step and usually misinterpreted, as we actually set thinking aside and check in with the energy of breath, body, feelings, emotions, and our surroundings. In twelve step we are also wisely advised to check in with our inner wounded and wonder child, and our inner critical and loving parent. As in all twelve step work, we also connect with Higher Power whether it feels critical or loving. This helps us stop the denial and disassociation we learned growing up to break the "don't talk, don't trust" rules and re-establish connection and communication with ourselves (body, feelings, emotions, surroundings), Higher Power, inner children, and inner parents.

3 The third step is acceptance of and surrender to all of the above. Acceptance is letting go, surrender is letting be. **Not as resignation**, but to embrace and soothe just as a loving parent takes an upset child into their arms and rocks it gently. This serves to calm the battle with negativity, judgment, and resistance going on within as we tried to push out "bad" things from ourselves and our world. Here we make peace with these energies and invite them into our "living room" to tell us their story and learn the lessons they have to teach us. The critical Higher Power and Parent are welcomed by the loving Higher Power and Parent, the wounded inner child by the wonder child, and so on down the line, a positive energy for every negative, two by two.

4 By recognizing our childhood survival skills, we learn to replace them with healthy and effective tools, and gradually gain the focus and concentration that give us much greater clarity, understanding, and insight. This understanding clears confusion, doubt, and separation and is the foundation of true love for ourselves and others. We needn't dig deeply into the past to find our hurts and problems, they come to us in daily life. We need only be authentically present in the moment; for now we have better tools, the wisdom and power of the teachings, the teachers, and the community to help and support us as we heal and grow.

5 Now comes the transformation: healing, sanity, well being, renewal, freedom, and vision that flow naturally from the grace of God. Our part is to continue to identify the seeds of suffering and stop watering them with past and future fears, and rather give them support and comfort. We also identify and water the seeds of love, peace, joy, and beauty by mindfully working our program, giving our will over to Higher Power, enjoying our lives one day and moment at a time, taking inventory regularly, making course corrections as needed, and being of service to others (give up, fess up, clean up, step up). This cycle continues daily in an unrelenting stream of living healing.

For my recovery website www.cowboydharma.com you may also email me at hikingbikingviking@earthlink.net

Recommended reading: Reconciliation: Healing the Inner Child Thich Nhat Hanh or Homecoming by John Bradshaw