

# bread for the journey

## Remembering Yesterday— Meditating Upon Today

The program of recovery encourages meditation.

Sit with good old Mother Earth. It will hold you. Scan the heavens as you sit there. They will not disappoint you. Get in touch with your inner heart and whatever truth lurks therein. Dare listen to its voice and it will tell you the truth. And the truth is sometimes hurtful—hurtful in a healing sort of way. Meditation is cutting edge business for recovering people who have had a lifetime of discouragement and disappointment. Bitterness and gall is how an Old Testament prophet might describe an addict's journey. By the time they get to **Step 11 of AA**,—which encourages prayer and *meditation*, most of the glitter and gold of a using career has worn thin because of the consequences which accompany the abuse of alcohol and other drugs.

Prayer and meditation help set the record straight. Jungian analysts tell us prayer and meditation help not so much to move us past the pain of the past but instead help us absorb its shocks and jolts as we move forward with our lives. We don't want to forget the harm we have done to others or forget the harm done to us. That is both impossible and unhealthy. We want to absorb those memories and work through the trauma. Re-member.

Old folks and other recovering people usually have a file folder of haunting dreams of what happened in their past lives. Old preachers often have “pulpit dreams” which can be simultaneously hilarious and frightening. I recall dreams of being in the pulpit ready to preach but have no sermon to preach, or notes so jumbled I can make no sense of what I am about to preach, or I am ready to preach but someone in the congregation has a better idea and takes it upon himself to preach the sermon. I have had dreams of standing behind a pulpit that was too big for me to see over or around. I have had chronic dreams of a choir that never stops singing the “Hallelujah Chorus.” The music never stops.

Recovering people who pray and meditate find themselves rehearsing and rehashing the past as well as the present moment. This is not a waste of time. It is an important exercise for good mental and spiritual health to embrace, absorb, understand and accept what happened yesterday, as well as tune in to what is happening now. Who said, “If we cannot remember the past we are condemned to repeat it?” No less a light than Spanish/American philosopher, George Santayana. And it was Mark Twain who reminded us for our present moments, “Man is the only animal that blushes—or needs to.”

The spirit of AA understands. Most of Alcoholics Anonymous—the fellowship and the program—suggest a rehearsal of the past and a reflection upon the “now.” The point of remembrance is not to beat ourselves with it or crucify ourselves because of yesterday's sins. The point of remembrance includes a sprinkling of humility and a large helping of prevention. I am not what I want to be. I am not what I could be. I am not yet what I am going to be. But thank God I am not what I used to be.

A recovering addict would agree. After the lie of the disease has been dismantled and the phony afterglow of “getting high” no longer glitters, they often come to terms with the truth of the way things are and the way things were. Sustaining sobriety is a lifelong challenge of remembrance in order to move forward. The Old Testament story is in large measure a story of remembrance. The Promised Land would have held no allure for ancient Israel if they failed to remember Egypt. Recovery would lose its incredible lightness of being if there were no remembrance of the dark night of the soul.

Prayer and meditation. Sit in the silence. Embrace the past. Tune in to the present. These are indispensable tools for sustained sobriety and lasting recovery. Growing up in the old Austin neighborhood left an imprint because of the daunting presence of Resurrection Catholic Church on Jackson Boulevard. Every Friday during the summer months, my Catholic buddies dropped their gloves and bat, left our 100 inning sandlot game, and headed

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off to see Monsignor Gorman. Why? To confess their sins. As the lone Protestant hold-out in the “hood,” I thought this was a silly waste of a summer afternoon. Secretly, I knew how incredibly important it was to tell a trusted spiritual advisor “how I screwed up this week, how I disrespected my parents, how selfishly narcissistic I had been, and how I envied Danny O’Brian for being so smart and so good at hitting that old beat-up baseball.”

Prayer and meditation have done a ton of good for this lifelong Protestant who was raised on lots of liturgy, boring sermons and never ending congregational singing. I have learned to meditate. Meditation sometimes happens on the fly. Here is an instance—wherein I was brought up short, humbled and spiritually jolted into an awakening.


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Second, I live with a trivial conundrum: I love golf, but since I stink at it, I hate it too. After a particularly bad round of flailing at the stationary little ball, I sat in my car alone to munch on a “Big Mac”—if only to soothe a wounded ego. I noticed a man my age babbling incoherently as he was being wheeled down the street in a chair by a uniformed caregiver. And I thought, “What a fool to let a bad round of golf spoil my day.”

Meditation. We alone are among God’s creatures capable of doing it. So do it. Life may be waiting for us. Prayer and meditation help us catch up with it. 

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is a bi-monthly news and views letter from Rev. Dr. William Lenters, Rosecrance Church Relations Coordinator. Bread for the Journey is written on behalf of people who live with substance use and mental health disorders. Together, and by God’s grace, we will try to make a difference.