



BREAKING
BARRIERS

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THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY AND MAKING A SPACE FOR A HIGHER POWER

A distinctive feature of being human is the search for purpose, meaning and wholeness. In a letter to Bill Wilson co-founder of AA, Carl Jung mentioned that he felt that addiction was a reflection of a misguided search for spiritual wholeness. The Big book of AA describes a spiritual awakening as “an alteration in our reaction to life.” Spirituality is therefore not something reserved for religious people, but is part of every human beings’ growth process.

However intelligent, wealthy and powerful you may be, you will probably come to some point in your life where you realise that **all your self-willed efforts to solve an addiction or other problem have failed. Whether or not you want to accept a higher power, you may grudgingly accept that you need something from outside of yourself** to help you navigate your way through unfamiliar territory. You may need to identify and own your less acceptable shadow qualities in order to clear the way for the emergence of latent, wiser and more creative qualities in yourself that can help you live with a new attitude and address issues in your life differently. Often the so-called unacceptable qualities find their rightful place in your makeup. For example your way of expressing anger may be unacceptable until you find a healthy way of expressing it; it can then become an important energy that helps you set appropriate boundaries.

Establishing a relationship with a power greater than yourself is an important **act of humility** – you’re admitting that alone you’re not completely whole or perfect and that your ego can’t provide you with the lasting satisfaction you seek. This doesn’t make you any less of a person, it simply makes you a more real person. There are many ways conceptualizing the spiritual journey and a higher power, but your personal concept of a higher power can never capture the rich Mystery of all that it is. This can only be **experienced** but never fully described; it is always more than our words and concepts can capture. Our well-developed left brains can never fully understand it so trying to intellectually understand it is a common obstacle for many people seeking something bigger than themselves.

For religious people, the concept of a higher power may pose little problem and finds expression in a relationship with a deity/God (“as we understood or didn’t understand God). If you have a religious belief system the 12 step programme and other forms of spiritual practice will help you deepen your relationship with God, and make your religion come alive for you. There is a huge difference between having a personal relationship with God, and having an intellectual concept and superficial faith. The depth of this relationship is tested when you are really up against it and you struggle to truly “Let go and let God.” However religious you may be, there will be times when **you** want to control everything from your ego’s perspective based on fear/greed/hurt etc. As you apply the principle of the Serenity Prayer,¹ doing what you can in the situation and surrendering the part of it that you can’t change, your experience helps you to “come to believe” that this power can “make the crooked places straight,” and do for you what you couldn’t do for yourself. Just applying this principle of “letting Go” can bring about significant change in your life experience, and above all **spirituality is about change**. (Remember the Big book definition above). We could further

¹ God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change The courage to change the things I can And the wisdom to know the difference

elaborate and say that spirituality is about seeking and allowing change in our relationships with ourselves, others, and something bigger than ourselves (a higher power).

What if you are not religious and don't believe in any benevolent God? Perhaps you were spiritually abused, are cynical or have had religion rammed down your throat. You may regard yourself as atheistic or agnostic at best. It is very important that you keep an open mind and be aware of your ego's attempt to provide you with a fragile sense of security by convincing you that you "know it all" (arrogance), don't need others and can therefore be completely self-reliant.

Some alternative ways of seeing a higher power

You can discover a power greater than yourself in any number of forms:

- eg in Nature and the magnificence of the Cosmos - remembering that you too are part of nature with a body that operates according to natural, biological laws that not even the most intelligent human mind can fully comprehend

- the "Lifeforce" or "universal energy" that permeates all things (science has something to say on this and talks of the "zero-point" field

- in the synergy and power of a group of people who share your problems and purpose (eg your 12 step or other support group); such a group of people committed to supporting each other can make it possible for you to achieve what you could never achieve alone.

- in your ancestors, as is common in many cultures all over the worlds.

- an idea like the Great Mystery or Great Spirit (the Native American tradition); some people in the West might call this Grace

- in the source and inspiration of great art, music or literature;

- in principles and values such as Compassion, Love, Equality and Integrity;

- within ourselves in the form of a "higher conscience" or a "still small voice" or loving Presence.

You may also start to trust Life, and the unexplainable little synchronicities which emerge.

In order to experience what some people call Grace, you need to practice the HOW of recovery (Honesty, Open-mindedness and Willingness), use "tools" (eg the principle of the Serenity Prayer) and slogans (eg "do the next right thing"), and take 100% Responsibility for your life. If you are in recovery from addiction then you would be well advised to work through steps 1 to 12 with your sponsor. You then put the Serenity Prayer into action by doing your bit, acknowledging what you can't do for yourself, and **allowing** the changes to happen within yourself and your life **in Life or your higher power's way and time**, not yours.

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