

Personal Responsibility & Spirituality
A Workshop by Shawn C.
GASN Mini Convention – February 26, 2005

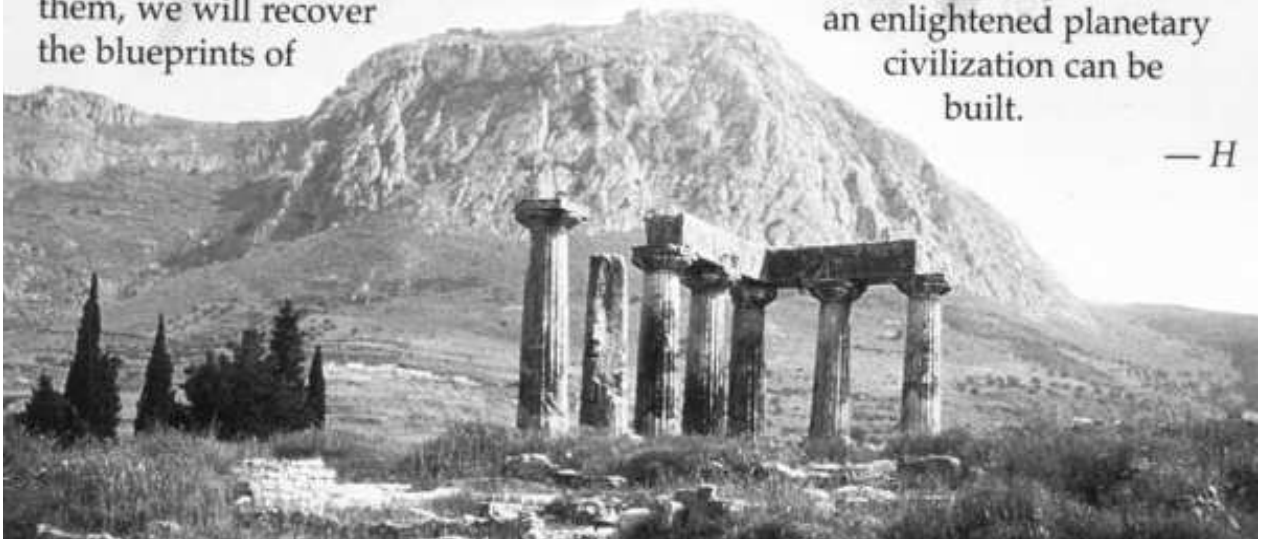
Personal Responsibility

It seems easier to defend actions than to honestly examine them. We are quicker to attack than admit. Admissions require courage!

When we summon the courage to take ownership of our experiences, to see them just as they are, to feel them, we will recover the blueprints of

our lives. We will face our fears and find the transparent beliefs that create them. Becoming more honest with ourselves means introducing more honesty into the collective consciousness of the world, and this lays a foundation upon which an enlightened planetary civilization can be built.

— H



“When we want to do something we find a way, but when we don’t we find an excuse.” -Donald Trump

SECTION 1: RESPONSIBILITY

“YOUR ABILITY TO RESPOND. Why? Most of the problems we experience in life are because we fail to take responsibility... What problems can you identify that point back to your not taking responsibility either in a timely fashion or not at all?”

“So you have a problem. And you have a good excuse for living with it, right? You're unappreciated, misunderstood, your parents raised you wrong, the school didn't teach you the right thing, the system is against you, you're broke, unemployed, you can't do anything right, you made a lot of mistakes ... There is nothing you can do about it because you are too young, too old, you are under-educated, overweight, you won't conform, you don't have any money.these are all excuses? Most people do not accept personal responsibility for what they want. They tend to blame others, circumstances, and conditions. Blaming makes us feel better, but it does not solve problems. What happens to us when we allow someone or something else to become responsible for us? We give up our personal power. The power to make decisions about our own lives, and to control our destiny. Are you willing to take that kind of chance with your life?”

So if you are a person who has never been good at taking responsibility:

- 1. Look around and find the most responsible person you know and ask for help or model their behavior.**
- 2. Take on small projects and see them through to completion. Then slowly increase the amount of responsibility you take on. The more we do, the more we can do, and the better we get.**
- 3. Accept 100% responsibility for what happens in your life, and know that you have the power to take control of many aspects of your life, mental and physical.**
- 4. Stop blaming and start making decisions and be responsible for the outcome good or bad.**

Take responsibility for creating, developing, and maintaining your place in this world. It's not so much what happens to you in life, but how you handle it. How you respond to it. Whether or not you are willing to step up to the plate and be responsible.

Accepting Personal Responsibility

Accepting personal responsibility includes:

- Acknowledging that you are solely responsible for the choices in your life.
- Accepting that you are responsible for what you choose to feel or think.
- Accepting that you choose the direction for your life.
- Accepting that you cannot blame others for the choices you have made.
- Tearing down the mask of defense or rationale for why others are responsible for who you are, what has happened to you, and what you are bound to become.
- The rational belief that you are responsible for determining who you are, and how your choices affect your life.
- Pointing the finger of responsibility back to yourself and away from others when you are discussing the consequences of your actions.
- Realizing that you determine your feelings about any events or actions addressed to you, no matter how negative they seem.
- Recognizing that you are your best cheerleader; it is not reasonable or healthy for you to depend on others to make you feel good about yourself.
- Recognizing that as you enter adulthood and maturity, you determine how your self-esteem will develop.
- Not feeling sorry for the "bum deal" you have been handed but taking hold of your life and giving it direction and reason.
- Letting go of your sense of over responsibility for others.
- Protecting and nurturing your health and emotional well being.
- Taking preventive health oriented steps of structuring your life with time management, stress management, confronting fears, and burnout prevention.
- Taking an honest inventory of your strengths, abilities, talents, virtues, and positive points.
- Developing positive, self-affirming, self-talk scripts to enhance your personal development and growth.
- Letting go of blame and anger toward those in your past who did the best they could, given the limitations of their knowledge, background, and awareness.
- Working out anger, hostility, pessimism, and depression over past hurts, pains, abuse, mistreatment, and misdirection.

How can failing to accept personal responsibility result in negative consequences?

When you have not accepted personal responsibility, you can run the risk of becoming:

- Overly dependent on others for recognition, approval, affirmation, and acceptance.
- Chronically hostile, angry, or depressed over how unfairly you have been or are being treated.
- Fearful about ever taking a risk or making a decision.
- Overwhelmed by disabling fears.
- Unsuccessful at the enterprises you take on in life.
- Unsuccessful in personal relationships.

- Emotionally or physically unhealthy.
- Addicted to unhealthy substances, such as the abuse of alcohol, drugs, food, or unhealthy behavior such as excessive gambling, shopping, sex, smoking, work, etc.
- Over responsible and guilt ridden in your need to rescue and enable others in your life.
- Unable to develop trust or to feel secure with others.
- Resistant to vulnerability.

What do people believe who have not accepted personal responsibility?

- It's not my fault I am the way I am.
- I never asked to be born.
- Now that you have me, what are you going to do with me?
- I want you to fix me.
- Life is unfair! There is no sense in trying to take control of my life.
- Why go on; I see no use in it.
- You can't help me, nobody can help me. I'm useless and a failure.
- God has asked too much of me this time. There is no way I'll ever be able to handle this.
- When do the troubles and problems cease? I'm tired of all this.
- Stop the world; I want to get off.
- Life is so depressing. If only I had better luck and had been born to a healthier family, or attended a better school, or gotten a better job, etc.
- How can you say I am responsible for what happens to me in the future? There is fate, luck, politics, greed, envy, wicked and jealous people, and other negative influences that have a greater bearing on my future than I have.
- How can I ever be happy, seeing how bad my life has been?
- My parents made me what I am today!
- The problems in my family have influenced who I am and what I will be; there is nothing I can do to change that.
- Racism, bigotry, prejudice, sexism, ageism, and closed mindedness all stand in the way of my becoming what I really want to be.
- No matter how hard I work, I will never get ahead.
- You have to accept the luck of the draw.
- I am who I am; there is no changing me.
- No one is going to call me crazy, depressed, or troubled and then try to change me.

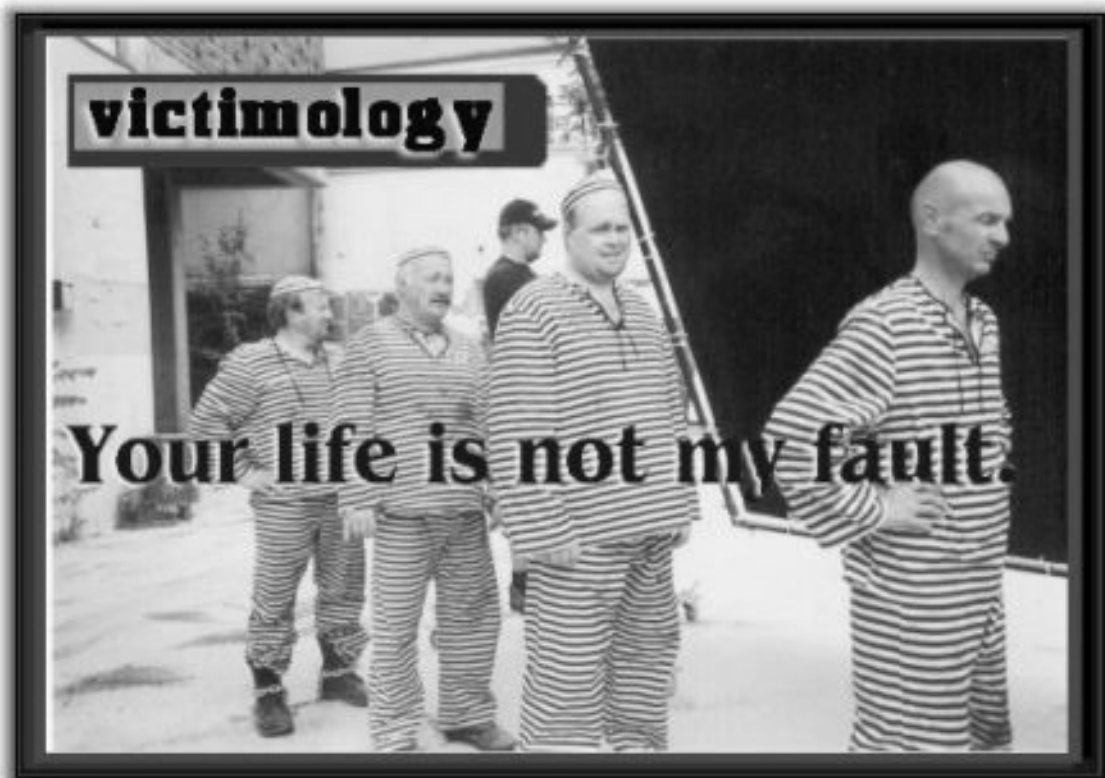
What terms are used to describe those who have not accepted personal responsibility?

martyrs, self-pitying, depressed, losers, quitters, chronically angry, dependent personalities, complainers, addictive personalities, blamers, stubborn, persons in denial, troubled people, stuck, fearful, pessimists, despondent, mentally unstable, obstinate, hostile, aggressive, irresponsible, weak, guilt ridden, resistant to help, passive, irrational, insecure, neurotic, obsessed, lost

What behavior traits need to be developed in order to accept personal responsibility?

In order to accept personal responsibility you need to develop the ability to:

- Seek out and to accept help for yourself.
- Be open to new ideas or concepts about life and the human condition.
- Refute irrational beliefs and overcome fears.
- Affirm yourself positively.
- Recognize that you are the sole determinant of the choices you make.
- Recognize that you choose your responses to the people, actions, and events in your life.
- Let go of anger, fear, blame, mistrust, and insecurity.
- Take risks and to become vulnerable to change and growth in your life.
- Take off the masks of behavior characteristics behind which you hide low self-esteem.
- Reorganize your priorities and goals.
- Realize that you are the party in charge of the direction your life takes.



Personal Responsibility Worksheet

Number 1: To decide if you are having problems accepting personal responsibility, answer the following questions in your journal:

- a. How frequently do you claim that others have determined what you are today?
- b. How easy is it to accept that you are responsible for your choices in life?
- c. How easy it is to believe that you determine the direction your life takes?
- d. How easy is it to blame others for where you are today?
- e. What masks do you hide behind to avoid accepting personal responsibility?
- f. How rational are you in dealing with the part you played in being who you are today?
- g. How easy is it to accept blame or admit mistakes?
- h. How easy is it to accept that you determine your feelings when negative events occur?
- i. How easy is it to depend solely on yourself for acceptance, affirmation, and approval?
- j. How willing are you to be the sole determinant of the health of your self-esteem?
- k. How frequently do you feel sorry for yourself?
- l. How easy is it to let go of guilt if you stop rescuing those in your life?
- m. How willingly do you take preventive steps to ensure your physical and emotional health?
- n. How successfully have you practiced self-affirmation in your life?
- o. How successfully have you practiced anger work out and letting go in order to get on with your life?

Number 2: Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 as to the level of personal responsibility you have accepted in each of the following areas: (Use the following scale as you write in your journal.)

- 1 = always irresponsible
- 2 = usually irresponsible
- 3 = irresponsibility balanced out with responsibility (neutral)
- 4 = usually responsible
- 5 = always responsible

Rating Area in Life:

- ___ a. Taking the preventive and maintenance measures to ensure physical health
- ___ b. Taking the preventive and maintenance measures to ensure emotional health
- ___ c. Controlling weight and over-eating
- ___ d. Stopping smoking, excessive drinking, and drug abuse.
- ___ e. Controlling excessive gambling, shopping, and sexual behavior
- ___ f. Controlling workaholism
- ___ g. Taking the preventive, and maintenance measures to ensure healthy relationships
- ___ h. Taking the necessary steps to overcome my current problems and troubles
- ___ i. Taking the necessary steps to protect myself from being victimized by my rescuing and enabling of others
- ___ j. Managing my time, managing the stress in my life, overcoming my fears, and preventing burnout in my life

Score: A rating of 3 or less in any of the areas indicates a need to accept personal responsibility.

Number 3: Identify your beliefs that prevent acceptance of responsibility for yourself. Develop new, rational, replacement beliefs to help you accept responsibility for yourself.

SECTION 2: Spirituality

Prayer plus positive thinking leads to creative change.

God always answers prayer.

When the idea is not right he says "No."

When the timing is not right he says "No."

When I am not ready he says "Grow."

And when all is in order he says "Go."

Spirituality is the:

- **Inward sense of a power or spirit** greater than you who has the whole world, your environment, and you in His hands. This greater power and spirit is God. God is what you believe Him to be. God is the power greater than you upon whom you can rely.
- **Admission to self** that God does have control of your life and that it is possible to turn to God with your problems. It is God's spirit that can provide for you the strength and courage to face your problems.
- **Amount of influence and control** you can exert on your life's direction in perspective. It is the recognition that you do not have to burn yourself out struggling to solve all your problems on your own. It is the openness to "let go" of your sense of over-responsibility and "let God" have some influence over the problems.
- **Recognition that you have a "relationship" with God** that needs to be continuously nurtured through giving God a share of your life in prayer, worship, and good deed.
- **Recognition that humans** consist not only of physical matter but also have a spiritual dimension that needs daily care in order to survive.
- **Healing attitude** you can bring to problems in your life. If God can accept you the way you are, with all your frailties and weaknesses, then you can accept yourself and others in the same way. Since God is able to forgive and forget all transgressions, failings, and misdeeds, you can learn to forgive and forget those of yourself and others.
- **Power to overcome** a sense of guilt, over-responsibility, over-control, rescuing, and enabling concerning others' problems. By tuning into God's message to mankind, you know that the troubled persons in your life have ready assistance anytime they call for help. Our helper in the deepest of deep problems is God. Handing our troubled persons over to God's power, mercy, and direction once we have taken all reasonable steps to help them is an act of spirituality.
- **Frame of reference** that keeps all problems, anxieties, fears, and needs in perspective. It recognizes that we are human beings; as such we are imperfect,

- prone to error, and not always strong enough to change. It recognizes that there is only one power strong enough to handle all problems, anxieties, fears, and needs; that is God. It also recognizes that God's will may be different from our will.
- **Mechanism through which people gain the strength**, understanding, confidence, and reassurance to let go of grief, fear, over-responsibility, and guilt. Spirituality is the well that must be tapped whenever you need to handle the loss events in your life.
 - **Texture of our lives** that enables us to risk being vulnerable to pain and hurt so that we can heal, change, and grow. In living a God-centered life we are able to recognize the need to open ourselves to new ideas, new concepts, new ways of acting, and new people so that we may discern God's plan and direction in our lives.

What are three characteristics of spirituality?

The three foundational characteristics of spirituality are Faith, Hope and Love.

Faith

Spirituality is easily identified in people who have a faith and belief in the power and presence of God in their lives. Their faith enables them to believe that God is helping them in their times of trouble, sorrow, and pain. Faith is the belief that God will never abandon or forget you during your time of need. Faith is clearly seen in the following story:

Footprints: One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the God. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonged to him, and the other to God.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned God about it. "God, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

Then God replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Anonymous

Hope

Spirituality is easily identified in people who have hope and trust in God's mercy, wisdom, and justice. Their hope enables them to "let go and let God." Their hope enables them to hand over their sense of responsibility, guilt, rescuing, and enabling to God's hands. Their hope enables them to take a "tough love" stance in order to get help for the troubled persons in their lives. Hope is reflected in the following prayer:

Serenity Prayer: 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.

Love

Spirituality is easily identified in people who are active in showing love, concern, and generosity to others. They are altruistic and giving in their approach to the world. They are able to make a difference in people's lives. The Prayer for Peace of St. Francis of Assisi embodies the love of mankind.

Prayer for Peace

*God,
Make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred,
Let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine, God,
Grant that I may seek
Not so much to be consoled,
As to console;
To be understood,
As to understand:
To be loved,
As to love;
For it is in giving
That we receive;
It is in pardoning
That we are pardoned;
It is in dying
That we are born to eternal life.*

To strengthen spirituality you need to:

- First be willing to accept God's spirit, influence, and power in your life.
- Be willing to admit God into your life and establish a viable relationship with Him by offering prayer and worship to Him.
- Begin to converse with God on a daily basis, letting God know how you are and what you are thinking through meditation and visualizations.
- Share your problems, worries, concerns, and troubles with God.
- Release your control over your own life and let God's will be made clear to you by signs of direction and discernment that only occur once you let go of the reins and let God lead you.
- Develop a healthy sense of humility and realism that God's power, knowledge, and wisdom is omnipotent.
- Let go of your need to always have a logical, clinical, scientific reason and research answer for the problems or troubles in your life.
- Reach out to the weaker, poorer, and less stable people in your life and offer them reasonable support, interest, and caring.
- Join forces with others who have a healthy spirituality in their own lives. They are able to encourage, reinforce, and support your efforts to grow in spirituality.
- Free yourself to accept the direction, leadership, and authority of God in your life. By letting God take the lead in your life you put your self-esteem and self-concept in a healthy, realistic perspective that lets you see where you end and God begins.



Section 3: Spirituality & Relapse

Mystical & Non-mystical Spirituality

There are two different ways of thinking about human spirituality. **Mystical spirituality** is based upon the belief that there is a spiritual world inhabited by a Higher Power or God. The meaning and purpose of life, according to mystical spirituality, can only be found through a conscious relationship with this spiritual Higher Power who reveals information not available through our ordinary senses or intelligence. The ultimate goal of mystical spirituality, therefore, is to establish a personal relationship with God, and to seek knowledge of his will and the courage to carry that out.

Non-mystical spirituality recognizes that human beings exist not only in the physical world, but also in a unique world of ideas, thoughts, feelings, and fantasies that transcends physical limitations. In this sense the word *spiritual* can be used interchangeably with the word *psychological*. Non-mystical spirituality, like psychology, is directed at learning to effectively use human mental powers to find meaning and purpose in life. The spiritual life is based upon developing these mental and emotional abilities. Non-mystical spirituality, however, believes that human beings can discover basic spiritual truths thorough the use of their senses and intellect. They do not rely upon divine revelation, but look to human reason to find the answers to sobriety.

Mystical and non-mystical spirituality are not mutually exclusive. Many recovering people have a mixed spiritual system. In the mystical sense, they seek to develop a personal relationship with the God of their understanding and pray to discover what God's will is for them. In a non-mystical sense, they actively work at psychological growth. They believe this mixture of the mystical and non-mystical captures the principle of "turning it over, but doing the leg work". Mystical spirituality allows them to turn over some aspects of their human experience to the care of a Higher Power. Non-mystical spirituality allows them to "do the leg work" by taking responsibility for personal growth and change.

Relapse & The Extremes of Mystical Spirituality

Extreme and rigid views of spirituality can result in relapse. Many people relapse because they believe that the mystical god of their understanding will somehow magically save them from their problems. They abdicate personal responsibility and expect God to take care of everything. When God doesn't, they sink into a deep existential depression and say, "Since God won't fix my life, I might as well get drunk."

An example of this is the man who turned \$60,000 worth of debt incurred from his cocaine addiction over to his higher power. He was absolutely shocked when his higher power turned his debts over to a collection agency.

Another man, who was divorced shortly after getting sober, looked to God to clean up his apartment. He was disappointed when God wouldn't do it. Upon spiritual reflection the man concluded that since God wouldn't clean his apartment, it must be God's will for him to live in the mess. Shortly afterwards he got drunk.

Relapse & The Extremes of Non-mystical Spirituality

Other people relapse because they cannot find a higher power to believe in. Some of these people are overwhelmed with such intense shame and guilt that they can't believe God or any other higher power is available to them. Others are locked into grandiosity. They see themselves as bigger, strong, and smarter than anyone or anything else in the universe. When they encounter overwhelming problems they feel cut off from all sources of courage strength and hope. They often become disillusioned and relapse to chemical use.

Most people who succeed in recovery have organized their sobriety around a source of meaning and purpose that is greater than themselves. Most practice the mixed system of spirituality described in the serenity prayer. The Serenity Prayer is "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can, 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".

People who live in accordance with these spiritual principles recognize that there are things that they can and must change if they are to stay sober, and they seek the courage to make those changes. They also recognize that there are other things that are beyond their control. They turn these things over to a Higher Power. They have faith that there is someone or something bigger, stronger and more powerful than they that will take care of the things that they can't manage. As a result, they can comfortably let go of the things that they cannot manage and invest their energies in taking care of things that are within their power.

Recovery & A Balanced Sense Of Spirituality

People who stay sober are able to transform themselves by surrendering their narrow, addictive world view and embracing a broader and more effective sobriety-based world view. This transformation is a spiritual process, though not necessarily a mystical one. It is a consciousness expanding experience that requires a belief that there is someone or something more powerful than I am. It requires a willingness to believe in a seek out that source of power, to ask for help, and ultimately to follow directions.

Recovering people need to find a source of courage and strength that can overcome frustration, transform despair into hope, and motivate them to move ahead in the sober life. Some recovering people find this in a mystical higher power that many call God. Others find it in the mysterious power present in their group conscience. Still others find it in a higher value system that replaces addictive thinking with rationality and reason.

People who maintain sobriety learn that they are responsible for themselves. They internalize the AA principle of "easy does it, but do it." They realize that they need to identify the next little thing they have to do to stay sober, and do it. In essence, they realize that they are responsible for whether or not they take the next drink or the next drug. They recognize that they must learn how to look within themselves and find the source of courage, strength, and hope needed to stay sober. Ultimately, they are responsible for rebuilding their lives and finding meaning and purpose in sobriety.

The Spiritual Paradox of Recovery

This is the paradox of recovery. We cannot do it alone, but yet we must do it by ourselves. We cannot expect God or a higher power to do what we are able to do for ourselves, but yet we cannot do it for ourselves without somehow touching a source of courage and strength that exceeds our own abilities. And here seems to be the ultimate spiritual principle that allows alcoholics to avoid relapse and move ahead in recovery. It is a philosophy of balance. It is the ability to recognize and affirm the quality of physical existence, to learn how the physical world operates and operate within the limits of its laws and imperatives. It is also the willingness to affirm the world of ideas, thoughts, and images. It is the ability to learn to turn within and find a creative spark of life, a creative spiritual energy that will allow us to go on and find solutions when none seem available. The balance of these two worlds, the world of physical reality, and the world of ideas where the ultimate spiritual reality exists, allow people to forge a strong and powerful sobriety.

SOURCES

[http://www.tgorski.com/gorski_articles/spirituality & relapse.html](http://www.tgorski.com/gorski_articles/spirituality_&_relapse.html)

<http://www.coping.org/growth/spirit.html>

<http://www.coping.org/growth/accept.html>

<http://www.lindaspeak.com/ptrespon.html>

THANK YOU