

*I Came.....*

*I Shared .....*

*I felt relieved*

274

12/10/95

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*I Shared .....*

*I felt relieved*

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## 1. MY DREAM WORLD Vs. THE REALITY I SEE NOW

I drank for happiness and became unhappy

I drank for joy and became miserable

I drank for sociability and became argumentative

I drank for friendship and made enemies

I drank for sleep and woke up disturbed

I drank for strength and felt weak

I drank to feel better, and acquired health problems

I drank for relaxation and got the shakes

I drank for bravery and became afraid

I drank to make conversation easier and slurred my speech

I drank for freedom and became a slave

I drank to forget problems and saw them multiply

I drank to cope with life but what is it that really happened?

## 2. I HAVE A DISEASE CALLED ALCOHOLISM

Before I came to the treatment centre, I cheated myself saying that I could stop drinking if only I decided to. I had tried several times to keep away from drinks. But I was not able to abstain for long. After some days, I would lose control and inevitably go back to compulsive drinking. But at that time, I was not prepared to ask for help.

During treatment, I learnt quite a few truths about myself. I understood that like diabetes or hypertension, compulsive drinking is also a disease. This disease is called alcoholism. Just like any other disease, alcoholism can also be treated.

I am unable to exercise any control over my drinking. This is not an indication of my lack of will power. Neither is it an evidence of wilfulness - a deliberate act to spite others. It is only a symptom of my disease - the disease of alcoholism.

I pray to God to give me the wisdom to totally accept the fact that I am an alcoholic, and the strength to manage my life without feeling the need to take alcohol.

### 3. I WILL PLAN JUST FOR TODAY

I feel weighed down and depressed when I think that I have to stay away from drinks for the rest of my life. I have tried this so many times in the past and miserably failed.

I am reminded of a clock that came to know it had a 2 year guarantee period. In this period, it would have to strike 6,30,72,000 seconds. The very thought of striking so many times made it absolutely tired, and so it stopped. Another clock noticed this and pointed out that it was happy it had to tick only once every second.

I learn a lesson from this story. I feel extremely anxious and afraid if I think that I should stay away from drinks for the rest of my life. Will I be able to abstain for such a long period?

Instead of thinking like this, if I say to myself: "Just for today, I will not drink-come what may", I experience feelings of confidence - the task seems much easier. So, if I decide to plan just for one day, I will feel comfortable. I renew this at the start of the next day. If I find it difficult to execute my plan for 24 hours, I will plan just for half-a-day. This can be renewed at the end of 12 hours. If even that is difficult, I can plan for 1 hour... If that is also threatening, for 'just now' - just for this moment.

I pray to God to give me the mental strength to abstain for today and spend it in a meaningful manner.



#### 4. MY FIRST DRINK DOES THE DAMAGE

After treatment, do I feel like having a drink? Do I start drinking again? With that, all sorts of problems overtake me. This is a fact that I have learnt from my own experience - the fact that I cannot exercise any control over my drinking. I have tried several times, but always lost control and inevitably went back to obsessive drinking.

When a stone comes rolling down a mountain, it cannot be stopped even if the mountain wishes to stop it. In the same manner, once I start drinking a little bit, I will not be able to stop even if I want to. So far as I am concerned, sobriety is a treasure which I have to preserve. What do I lose if I drink? What do I lose when I lose my sobriety? It is not just a concept or an idea or a title. When I lose my sobriety, sooner or later, I will lose the job I have regained, the family that is now coming closer to me, the friends I meet again. These I will lose, if I lose my sobriety - if I drink.

When I start drinking again, my intention is to have only one peg; nothing more. But I am unable to stop with one. One more - one more small one - I go on and on and end up with obsessive drinking. It is the first drink which triggers, immediately or sometime later, a compulsion to drink more and more, until I am surrounded by problems. For me, drinking means nothing but despair. With this



awareness, I gain the resolve to drive the urge away.

Why does the thought of drinking seem so pleasant when it comes? This is because I am reminded only of the pleasant episodes of my early drinking. What must I do? I must deliberately and consciously remind myself of what follows my drinking - problems on the job, strained family relationships, the lack of love of my children, the pain and misery I cause. These are the things I must remind myself of when I feel like drinking. When I repeat this exercise, my resolve not to drink is strengthened, because the thought of drinking will not be a pleasant thought any more.

I pray to God to give me the wisdom to totally accept the fact that I am an alcoholic and keep me from the self-deception that I can gain control of my drinking again.

## 5. I AM POWERLESS ONLY OVER ALCOHOL

Now I realise the fact that I am an alcoholic. Until I came to the treatment centre, I was under the wrong impression that I could exercise my willpower and stop drinking whenever I wanted. I had changed the places of drinking, changed the friends with whom I drank, changed the time of drinking, and also changed the types of drinks - all with the purpose of exercising control over my drinking. But whatever changes I made, I could not succeed in exercising control. I would start with the intention of drinking a little bit, but would inevitably end in excessive drinking.

I am unable to stay away from alcohol. I am unable to exercise control over my drinking. Does it mean that I do not have will power? Definitely not. I am powerless only over alcohol. I cannot stop with a little bit of drinking. But in all other areas of my life, I can exercise my will power and achieve quite a lot. I can get back and excel in the job which I have lost, by exercising my will power. I can renew all the relationships that are strained by using my will power. I can lead a meaningful life with the use of my will power. If I have to achieve all these things, what is it that I should do? I have to do only one thing. I should decide not to take even a drop of alcohol, and at the same time work hard to make improvements in the quality of my life. I am sure God will be on my side when I strive to make positive changes in my life.

## **6. I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR MY DRINKING**

During my drinking days, I would always justify my drinking with ease.

"My wife doesn't respect me. That is why I am drinking."

"My parents are too strict. They are responsible for my drinking."

"My boss is too inconsiderate. He mercilessly extracts work from me. I drink just to calm my nerves."

Whenever I drank, I held others responsible. I blamed people, places, surroundings, situations, the way I was born, the way I was brought up, and so on. I would justify my drinking by pointing my finger at one of these. Only now when I have stopped drinking, do I realise the fact that drinking cannot solve my problems. Whenever I pointed my finger at someone, the other three fingers were pointing at me. At that time, I was not prepared to see any of my shortcomings. But now I am able to see both my strengths and my limitations. When I do that, I realise that I alone am responsible for my drinking.

I pray to God to give me the wisdom to take responsibility for my actions and not blame others for my shortcomings.

## 7. I WILL LEAD A QUALITATIVE LIFE

After coming to the treatment centre, I have become aware of the fact that sobriety is an invaluable treasure which I have to protect. Achieving sobriety is like building a house. How do we start building? We make a big, thick concrete slab on which we can erect the house. That foundation to me, is the equivalent of stopping drinking. But the concrete slab, unprotected and exposed to the heat, cold, wind and rain cannot become a house. I have to build a roof and some rooms to make it habitable. In the same manner, abstinence alone cannot make recovery complete. I have to make conscious efforts to make improvements in my family/ social relationships, in my job, my attitude and my behaviour. It is my duty to get back whatever I have lost so that this new life becomes meaningful.

Now that I am leading a sober life, I pray to God to give me the strength and ability to make positive changes in various areas of my life, so that my life becomes productive and worthwhile.

## **8. I WILL ACCEPT WHATEVER I CANNOT CHANGE, AND CHANGE THOSE WHICH 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."

There are certain things in my life which I cannot change. I cannot change the family in which I was born, the parents who are responsible for my very existence, the events that have happened, and the fact that I am an alcoholic. These are things that have already happened. There is no point in clinging to the past and mourning over it. I should 'let go' of these things, by accepting whatever has happened.

On the other hand, there are quite a few things in my life which I can change. I can change my attitude and behaviour. I can strengthen the relationship with my wife. I can regain the respect and affection of my children. I can make the effort needed to get back the job which I have lost.

It is not all that easy to find out the subtle difference between the things I can change and the things over which I have no control. I am sure God will give me the wisdom to differentiate between the two.

## 9.GOD WILL PROTECT ME

During my drinking days, I did not have any faith in the power of God. I thought that I would be able to handle all my problems alone. What was the result? - endless worry, fear, anger, hatred and guilt. I did not know how to handle these emotions. So what did I do? I numbed my feelings by drinking and again inevitably got caught in a multitude of problems. Alcohol never gave me the strength to face problems.

I learnt the truth only after I came to the treatment centre. I realised I needed a real power to support me. I understood that without that support, I will not be able to carry on. I started believing in the strength of the Higher Power, of God. I felt the benefits derived from prayer and meditation.

Now I realise that God is a Power which can be compared to electricity. When I enter a dark room, I simply switch on the light. I never stop to find out how the light burns or how electricity works. It is there for me to use, and I simply use it. Similarly, God is a Higher Power which is available to me that I can make use of. There is no need to question the existence or whereabouts of God.

When I totally surrender to this Higher Power, I get over the hurt feelings of the past. I also gain the strength to manage the feelings of anger, hatred, jealousy and grief which may bother me in the future. This Power is like a stream found in a desert. I have now got a hold to cling on to - a real power which leads me through the paths of life.



## 10. I WILL DEVELOP PATIENCE

A few children went to a garden, sowed some seeds and enthusiastically poured water. They were so happy that they could not even sleep that night. At day break, they came running to the garden, expecting the seeds to have grown and blossomed. When they saw no flowers, not even a single plant, they were thoroughly disappointed, totally sad. They went back home in frustration, and never came back to the garden. As there was nobody to water the seeds, the seeds perished.

This story brings home the truth that we will only be disappointed if we impatiently expect things to happen immediately. Many times, even if we have done our best, we may not be able to see the result immediately. For instance, we may not be able to get back our jobs for quite some time. Our wives may not be prepared to come back and join us at once. Also it may take some time for us to pay back our debts.

So, if we are under the impression that all our problems will get solved immediately and that we would be able to lead a happy, problem-free life all at once, we will be disappointed. We have to build our new life brick by brick, and this requires a lot of patience and perseverance.

## 11. I WILL CHANGE MY OLD LIFE STYLE

What should I do to make abstinence possible? Initially I should change my old routine and my old life style. During the initial stages of abstinence, I should avoid people, places and events associated with drinking. When we plant a small seedling, we erect a fence around it. Why do we do this? This is to protect the tender plant from cows and goats. But when the same plant grows into a tree, it does not require the fence any more. By now it would have reached a size which cannot be affected by cattle. Moreover, the same goats and cows which were a threat to the plant, now come and take shelter under the shade of the tree. During the initial stages of abstinence, I, like the tender plant, also require a fence - a fence to protect me from going back to drinking again. I should protect myself by avoiding places, people, events, and situations connected with drinking. After some time - may be after two or three years of sobriety or even sooner, I would have started enjoying the alcohol-free life. At that time, the fence would not be required for me. I would by then have got the mental strength and courage to offer help to other alcoholics whom I had avoided during the initial stages of abstinence.

## 12. I WILL STRENGTHEN THE RELATIONSHIP WITH MY CHILDREN

A frog living in a pond was an ardent devotee of Lord Rama. Whenever he had any problem, he would pray to Rama and totally surrender to Him. Once, Rama himself accidentally came to the pond. He wanted to wash his feet and got into the pond. Unknowingly, he pressed the frog with his bow. The frog was struggling in pain but did not open its mouth. Rama bent down and when he saw the suffering frog, he was shocked. He felt very sorry for the frog and asked, "Why didn't you tell me that I was hurting you? Ah! why did you suffer like this?"

The frog replied, "Whenever I have a problem, I call you for help. Now that your own bow hurt me, I didn't know whom to approach for help."

The state of my children has been like that of this frog. During my drinking days, how many times have I shouted unnecessarily at my children? Have I ever shared their happiness, listened to their problems, pain or sorrow? Have I atleast once enquired whether they had their lunch or dinner? Have I respected their feelings, cared about their well being? Never. They had longed for love and were utterly disappointed. The only feeling they had was fear.... fear.... fear. They did not know to whom to turn for help.

I became aware of my duties only after I stopped drinking. Now I realise that it is my duty to take care of my children. The bridge between me and my children is getting strengthened. My children who were hiding themselves in shame, now come and share their feelings with me. I am willing to listen to what they say. I have got back the treasure which I was about to lose. I will spend the rest of my life in strengthening this relationship.

### 13. I WILL DEVELOP THE ABILITY TO MANAGE CHALLENGES

Why do these things happen to me and to me alone?

Why am I alone an alcoholic?

What did I do? Why am I alone suffering like this?

Why is my family behaving like this?

I had often been questioning myself and indulging in self-pity. Later on I became aware of the fact that these 'whys' only led to clever explanations and rationalisations of what I did or how I was. The question for me is not 'why' but 'how'.

The 'how' gives me a deeper understanding of myself.

How am I going to recover from alcoholism?

How am I going to find a suitable job?

How am I going to strengthen my relationship with children?

'Why' is irrelevant. Learning 'how' to live is essential.

I may be required to face problems and hardships in my life. I have to take each one of them as a challenge and not get bewildered. When I manage problems, I also become aware of my strengths and positive qualities. I am able to face life with courage, making it meaningful and productive.

#### **14. I WILL USE THE SAME YARD STICK WITH WHICH I MEASURE MYSELF TO MEASURE OTHERS**

During my drinking days, I used to constantly find fault with others.

If my wife achieves what she wants to, she is obstinate.

If I do the same thing, I am capable.

If she doesn't like my friends, she is prejudiced.

If I don't approve of her friends, I am discriminating.

If I hesitate to spend money, I am thrifty.

If she does so, she is stingy.

If she spends money, she is a spendthrift.

If I do so, I am generous.

If she scolds the children, she is irritable and angry.

If I do that, I am disciplining them.

If she doesn't 'let go', she is stubborn.

If I behave in the same manner, it is an indication of my will power.

If she works slowly, she is dull.

If I take time to complete a job, I am thorough.

Now I realise that even though we were behaving in the same manner, my perception of her was different. Hereafter I will use the same yard stick with which I measure myself, to measure her also.



## 15. I RECEIVE WHAT I GIVE

A little boy, not familiar with the echo, went to a forest. He thought he heard the voice of another boy not very far off. He shouted, "Hello, there!" and the voice shouted back, "Hello, there!"

He cried at the top of his voice - "You are a mean fellow!", and the cry came back, "You are a mean fellow!" The boy got upset, went home and told his mother that there was a bad boy in the woods. The mother understood that it was an echo, and said, "Ramu! speak kindly to him, and he will also be kind to you!"

The little boy went back to the woods and shouted, "You are a good boy!" Out came the echoing reply, "You are a good boy!" "I love you" - he shouted happily. "I love you" - replied the faithful echo.

The story of echo is exactly the story of our lives. What we see in others, is only a reflection of what is within ourselves. If we show love and affection to others, we will automatically get back their love and affection. When my mind is filled with positive thoughts, negative feelings do not bother me. I pray to God to help me develop the nature to be kind and considerate to others.



## 16. I HAVE NO RIGHT TO DEMAND

Now that I am recovering from alcoholism, there is nothing wrong if I expect to enjoy life or if I expect my family members to treat me with respect. But problems arise once my expectations turn into demands.

As soon as I stopped drinking, I wanted my family members to show respect, care and concern for me. I got irritated if they did not listen to me. I became resentful.

I learnt several truths only after coming to the treatment centre. In life, the husband and wife should equally share responsibilities. Life can be compared to a weighing scale. When we got married, we shared responsibilities. The two scales of the balance carried equal responsibilities. But what happened later on? I started drinking excessively and stopped doing any duty. The result was that she was forced to shoulder more and more responsibilities and her scale weighed down. Not only did I fail to do my duties, I also held her responsible for not carrying out my responsibilities. I continuously found fault with her.

All along, I had not respected others' feelings; not lived up to their expectations. After leading such an irresponsible life for so long, is it justified if I want others to change

immediately and do whatever I want them to? Instead of demanding from others, I should focus my attention on myself and start thinking about what I can do. It may take some time for others to renew their trust in me. I must be patient.

I pray to God to give me the courage to take up responsibilities and carry them out to the best of my abilities.

## 17. I WILL BECOME SELFLESS

During my drinking days, I was thoroughly selfish. My only concern was myself. I would wake up in the morning with a hangover, and my only thought would be about how terrible I felt and what I could do to make myself feel better. I could not see beyond myself and my need for another drink.

Now I have become aware of the happiness associated with the life lived for others. I am reminded of a story. A male and a female elephant got stranded in a desert and were feeling thirsty. They found some water in a small pond nearby. When the female elephant saw this, she requested the male elephant to drink the water. But the male elephant asked the female to quench her thirst first. Finally they decided to go to the pond and share the water between themselves. They put their trunks inside the pond. But the level of water did not go down. Why? The female elephant waited for the male elephant to drink, whereas the male elephant waited for the female. This is meaningful life. The happiness of life lies in sharing, in sacrificing and in giving up for others.

A selfless life of service is the finest life I can live. I pray to God to make it possible for me to give up my selfishness and develop an attitude of being helpful to others. I am sure He will help me to look out beyond my own self and live a meaningful life for the sake of my family and friends.

## **18. I WILL NOT GET HURT BY OTHERS' FALSE ACCUSATIONS**

Even after I stop drinking, I may be required to face frustrating situations. My family members may become suspicious and treat me as if I were still drinking. They may irritate me. For example, if they find some cash missing, they may suspect me. How do I handle these situations? Can I go back to drinking and rationalise my behaviour using such situations as alibis? No! certainly not. My life is totally in my hands and I have the full authority to make the best use of it. Others can't ruin my life.

A wandering saint was going along with his disciples. In one of the houses, a lady abused him. The saint walked away without uttering a single word. His disciples got irritated and they told him that he should have shouted back. The saint replied, "If somebody gives you an article, it will belong to you only if you accept it. If you don't accept, it will remain with the person who gives it. In the same manner, the lady's abuse did not belong to me and that is the reason why I didn't accept it. If I had shouted back, it would only have meant that I have accepted it."

Now I realise that if others 'pick on' me for no reason, I need not feel hurt about those words. I pray to God to give me the capacity not to react to false criticism. I will just ignore them.

## 19. I WILL NOT BE GRANDIOSE ANYMORE

During my drinking days, I had exhibited grandiose behaviour. My wife would have been struggling without the money necessary to buy daily provisions. I would not bother about this, but would spend money on buying drinks for my friend. On the verge of losing my job, I would boast that the office would not function without me. My son would be suffering from fever. I would not take him to the doctor; instead, I would spend that time buying sweets for my friend's child. All along, I had been deceiving myself that I was a generous person, with a lot of love and affection for others.

I began to understand myself only after coming to the treatment centre. My actions were not the result of love, not the result of sympathy, but only an expression of my grandiosity. I was trying to project myself as a capable person, whereas I had been feeling inadequate inside. What am I going to do in my new life? I will have an honest look at myself and try to change in areas which need improvement, instead of putting on a facade. I pray to God to give me the ability and courage to shed my grandiose behaviour and replace it by love and respect for others.

## 20. ANGER WILL HINDER MY RECOVERY

During my drinking days, I had been an extremely angry person. I would expect everything to happen the way I want and in the time scale in which I want. If it didn't happen, I would get angry and irritated. I would never stop to think whether my anger was realistic. At times, I had suppressed my anger and became totally silent. I would not open my mouth even though I was not calm inside.

Every pressure cooker has a safety valve. What is the role of this valve? It releases excess pressure accumulated inside the cooker. If that valve does not function, the release of excessive pressure will not happen, as a result of which the cooker will burst. In the same manner, whenever I tried to suppress anger, I used to 'burst' and show it unnecessarily on people who had nothing to do with it. My anger repeatedly got misplaced and meaningful relationships became sour.

Even after I had stopped drinking, I continued to be angry and irritable. I was under the wrong impression that I had made a sacrifice by abstaining and so I was not prepared either to give up anger or to stop for a moment and think whether my anger was realistic or not.

After coming to the treatment centre, I came to understand that anger is a strong impediment to recovery. Whenever I got angry,



I stopped to think whether my anger was realistic. If I felt it was realistic, I would communicate the reason for my anger to the person with whom I was angry. I started doing things which gave me relaxation and peace of mind. Once I followed this pattern, my relationship with others got strengthened, and I acquired peace of mind.



## 21. I REALISE THE NEED FOR GOOD FRIENDS

During my drinking days, I was surrounded by many people. Now I realise that those whom I thought were my real friends, were nothing but drinking companions. There was no deep relationship between them and me. Actually alcohol was only separating me from my good friends.

Now I have stopped drinking. I have got the real friendship of A.A. members who lead sober lives. Their friendship is very valuable to me. I come to understand many truths when I share my experiences and problems with them. When I listen to them, I get a lot of clarity in my thinking. I am also able to handle my problems in a calm manner.

I am reminded of a story when I think about the friendship of A.A. members. A father tied several sticks together and asked his sons to break the bundle. Each one of them tried, but could not do it. The father untied the bundle and asked them to break. It was easy to break them one by one. What do I learn from this story? It is easier to achieve together in a group what you cannot achieve alone. For me, it is safer to be in a group. There is a power in the friendship of A.A. members. There is security in it. My very life rests on this fellowship. I pray to God to give me the strength to cherish and protect this invaluable gift which I have got.

## 22. TO ME, SOBRIETY IS LIKE A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN

I will be disappointed if I expect everything in my life to change for the better as soon as I stop drinking. This change will take place only slowly.

My life can be compared to a garden. Because of my actions during my drinking days, a patch of the garden is overgrown with weeds. Now during abstinence, I have been given the gift of new seeds. I have to use them and help the plants to grow. I have to remove the weeds, sow the new seeds, put manure, pour water, and patiently wait for the plants to grow. If I pluck them up every day to see how they have grown, they will die. I need to give them time. It is the same with my sober life. If I want my life to become meaningful, I should strive to make positive changes. I will deal with my resentments and anger as with weeds, and will pluck them out when they are small so that they don't take root and grow. I will make use of the manure of patience, selflessness and taking up responsibilities. The water of hard work and perseverance will help in the growth of my sobriety. When I do this, I will regain all that I have lost - the love of my children, the relationship with my wife, my standing in society. In short, my life will turn into a beautiful garden.

## 23.RELAPSE

After treatment, I started drinking again. Was it an action which had happened beyond my control? No. Even before I started drinking, there were many warning signs which indicated that I was going to get back to drinking. I was aware of them and still did not take the necessary steps to prevent a relapse.

What happened before I started drinking? Initially my thoughts went out of control, "I have abstained for so long. Why not have a glass of beer?" I did not even feel guilty when such thoughts entered my mind. "I haven't done anything wrong. I have not started drinking after all" - I used to convince myself. In this manner, I was actually allowing my negative thoughts to grow.

What happened after that? I started going to places and meeting friends associated with drinking. I entered the bar. I would not drink alcohol, but take soda or fruit juice inside the bar. Whenever I did this, I convinced myself that I had the willpower to stay away from drinking. Many a time, I had sarcastically told my wife that I was going to start drinking again.

What did such situations lead to? I found myself drinking again. I would start with the intention of having only one peg. I would start with one, but would not be able to stop, and inevitably end up with obsessive drinking along with all the associated problems.

After these experiences, I have realised the inevitable truth. Whenever the thought of drinking enters my mind, I should pluck out those thoughts without letting them take root. If I do not take action immediately, such thoughts will grow into a big poisonous tree and after that, removing them will become a very difficult process. I pray to God to help me identify the warning signs and give me the mental strength to abstain from drinking.

## 24. I SHOULD STAY STOPPED FROM DRINKING

I had tried several times to stop drinking on my own. When I was going on a pilgrimage, I had abstained for 40 days. Once I had promised in the name of my son and did not drink for 15 days. When one of our relatives got married, I had abstained continuously for a week. During those days, I had not been drinking but did not bother to take any efforts to make improvements in my life style.

I considered my abstinence to be a major sacrifice. So I was constantly getting irritated with others. Whenever others did not respond to my demands, I used to get angry and shout at them.

I expected others to be at my service; but I never considered anything as my duty. I did not feel the need to rectify my defects like anger, grandiosity, selfishness or irresponsibility.

Now after treatment, I am aware of the truth. It is not enough if I merely stop drinking. In order to stay stopped, I have to change my attitude and behaviour. Only when I make changes and improve the quality of life, I will be able to stay stopped from drinking.

I pray to God to give me the mental strength to change my personality defects, my behavioural patterns and the way I look at others, so that my life becomes meaningful.

## 25. I CANNOT DRINK EVEN A SMALL QUANTITY OF ALCOHOL

Before I came for treatment, I thought I could become a social drinker. Now I realise it is not possible. I have now understood that I have a disease called alcoholism. I will not be able to take even a small quantity of alcohol throughout my life.

No matter how my life changes, I cannot drink. It is like getting wet in the rain. If I am in the rain, I can stand, sit, lie down, walk or even run. I will still get wet. In the same manner, I may change the time of drinking or type of drinks. But whatever changes I make, so long as it is alcohol that I am taking, I will not be able to exercise any control over my drinking. If I start drinking a little bit, that will inevitably lead to uncontrolled drinking and to all the associated problems as well.

For a person who is in the rain, the only way to avoid getting drenched, is to take shelter. Totally staying away from alcohol is the only thing which will provide shelter for me.

I pray to God to give me the wisdom to totally accept the fact that for me there is no other way except total abstinence.

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## 26. I WILL ENJOY THE PLEASURES AND HAPPINESS OF LIFE

Looking back, during my drinking days, I had made a mess of my life. I thought I could become happy and enjoy life through drinking. The more I relied on alcohol, the more happiness eluded me. Finally only pain and problems remained.

Now I realise that sobriety is a journey of joyful discovery. Each day brings new experiences, new awareness, greater hope, deeper faith and wholesome joy. I am able to see the beauty and goodness of the world. I have become aware of 'small' pleasures. I am able to enjoy the food I eat. I derive satisfaction when I spend time with my wife and children. I am able to see beauty hidden in the smile of kids. I am able to walk on the road without a sense of shame. I even save a little bit of money at the end of every month. I am able to enjoy all the pleasures, which I had not seen so far.

I am grateful to God for having given me the wisdom and ability to enjoy the daily pleasures of sober life.



## 27. MY CHILDREN ONLY SEE HOW I BEHAVE

A shopkeeper had sold two of his parrots to two different customers. After a month, he happened to go past the houses of both these customers. When he was walking along the first customer's house, he heard the parrot saying, "Please come in, please do come in."

The shopkeeper was very happy. When he came near the second customer's house, he was shocked when that parrot shouted, "Kill him, shoot him!" The shopkeeper was surprised. "I sold both the parrots on the same day! Both are of the same kind. Now why is it that one is very warm and the other is rude?" He thought for a while and suddenly got the answer. The first customer is a very warm and hospitable person and so his parrot is also very kind and loving. The second customer plays the role of a villain in dramas and therefore, the parrot which has seen him rehearse, has taken the villain as its model.

What do I learn from this story? My children are also like these parrots. They will take me as their role model and follow my behaviour. If I am an angry, irresponsible, selfish person, my children will also develop the same qualities. On the other hand, if I am a kind person, willing to take up responsibilities and respect the feelings of others, my children will also grow up with those positive qualities. So, I should behave in the same manner in which I want my children to behave.

## 28. THE PRICELESS GIFT I HAVE GOT IS 'TODAY'

God has given me 'today'. I realise that it is an invaluable gift. I can make improvements in life and get peace and happiness out of it, if only I am able to use every bit of today in a meaningful manner.

I will not waste my time in mourning over the past. The past is gone. Whatever has happened, has happened. There is no use thinking about what is past and cannot be changed. At the same time, I will not spend my time worrying about the future either. If I think of the future, I will only feel worried because it will appear to be an endless, lonely path. The future with all its uncertainties will only lead to fear and sorrow. Instead of thinking about the past or worrying about the future, I will plan just for today. My future will become meaningful if I plan my day properly and start executing my plans.

I will thank God for this beautiful day. I will remind myself that I will not drink alcohol this day, whatever be the circumstances or temptations. I will make a meaningful plan for today and carry it out without hurry or agitation. My plan will include my obligations to my work, family and society as a responsible human being. I will find happiness when I fulfil my duties to my own satisfaction.

## 29. I WILL BE CAUTIOUS

What did they repeatedly tell us at the treatment centre? "During the initial stages of abstinence, it is important to avoid people and places connected with drinking. You should also consciously avoid thoughts connected with drinking." Did I listen to what they said? Everytime I heard them say this, my answer would be, "I have the willpower to abstain. I can stop drinking if I want to."

But what happened as a result? Whenever I went to see old friends or visited places connected with drinking, I inevitably started drinking again. Eventually I would lose control and feel guilty. In order to escape from the guilt, I would drink more and more.

Now I have learnt a lesson. Alcohol has got a hold on me. I am like a pin which is near a powerful magnet. As long as I am within the force of the magnet, I will be drawn closer to it. So whenever I had tried to establish my willpower by drawing close to the people or places connected with drinking, I could not resist the temptation. When a snail perceives any danger, it protects itself by drawing its body inside the shell. Like the snail, I will also protect myself during the initial stages of abstinence by not exposing myself to the old routine. I pray to God to give me the mental ability to avoid things associated with drinking.

### 30. I SHOULD HAVE PERSEVERANCE

During the initial stages of abstinence, I had to face lots of problems. I felt I was climbing a mountain. I was climbing to reach the light on top called sobriety. There were several occasions when I felt that I would slip down and fall. In other words, I would think of going back to drinking again - "I have struggled for so long, so why not give up this fight and go back to drinking?" When people climb mountains, they make use of foot holds to protect themselves from the slippery slopes. In the same manner, whenever the thought of drinking came to my mind, I would cling to somebody and ask for his help. That person might be an A.A. member, a sponsor, or it could even be the faith I had in the Higher Power. They had always shown me the right path. They had warned me about the pitfalls. Their help had always saved me from slipping, and taught me the benefits of perseverance.

I have seen the spider weaving its web. Even if we destroy the web, the spider does not stop weaving. It continues to weave without losing patience. Like the spider, I have to develop patience and perseverance to make my life meaningful.

### 31. I WILL BECOME DISCIPLINED

During my drinking days, I had never done anything in a disciplined manner. The time I went to bed, the time I had my food, the time I went for work - there was no discipline in any of these. I had never attached importance to doing things properly. It was very difficult for me to follow any routine in a disciplined manner.

Even small insects teach me valuable truths. I see ants filing past in a straight line. I try to disturb them. But whatever I do, they get back to the same line. When I see this, I start thinking. When such small insects can be so very disciplined, why can't I?

Now that I have given up drinking, I realise the importance of discipline and control. Discipline applies to my thoughts. Now I feel the need to exercise control over the thoughts associated with drinking. I have to exercise discipline in my speech and behaviour. If I start thinking in a disciplined manner, I will be able to make improvements in the quality of my life. I will also be able to overcome my laziness, irresponsibility and loneliness.

I pray to God to help me in my efforts to lead a disciplined life and keep me trying until my thoughts turn into actions.

*Printed by*

Mr. N. Balakrishnan, Printograph,  
59, Luz Avenue, Madras 600 004

*Published by*

Mrs. Shanthi Ranganathan,  
TT Ranganathan Clinical Research Foundation,  
17, IV Main Road, Indira Nagar, Madras 600 020

*Distributed by*

Mr. J. Srinivasan,  
TT Ranganathan Education Foundation  
17, IV Main Road, Indira Nagar, Madras 600 020