

Your Intellectual Nature



Part A - Discovery: What Have You Become?

INTRODUCTION

“I think, therefore I am,” said the drunken farmer to his cow with arrogant superiority. “You think, therefore you drink”, replied the cow placidly, “I don’t think, I just am.”

Human intellect separates humans from other animals. Humans are brighter than other animals. The way you use your intellect separates *you* from other humans. You use your intellect to get yourself into a lot of trouble. Which is a pity, since it is through their intellects that all humans receive the spiritual gifts of self-awareness and free will. People with an addiction are forever turning these gifts into burdens.

You used your free will through your addictive activity to get *out* of yourselves and *out* of your world. You tried to change reality. Yet reality did not stay changed and came crashing back onto you. In time you gained intellectual awareness that your addictive activity was not working and was instead harming you, yet you continued that activity *anyway*. Now you have decided to change *yourself* instead of reality, by entering into recovery. Part of *your* journey in recovery involves changing your intellectual nature, changing the way you think

“We have found that we had no choice except to completely change our old ways of thinking or go back to using.”¹ “The solution to our problem is a profound change in our thinking and our behaviour. We need to change how we perceive the world and alter our role in it. We need to change our attitude.”²

“Faced with alcoholic destruction, we soon became as open minded on spiritual matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect alcohol was a great persuader.”³ It is through their intellectual natures that all humans do their thinking. Yet for people with an addiction it is “stinking thinking that leads to drinking”, according to an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) slogan. So you need to get your thinking right if you are to stay in recovery.

(A) Do you think your stinking thinking led to your drinking, or drugging or gambling, or perhaps helped to make it worse?

¹ *Narcotics Anonymous* (5th ed, 1988) p21

² (NA) *It Works: How and Why* p37

³ *Alcoholics Anonymous (The Big Book)* (3rd ed) p48

The 12 Steps And Addicts' Intellectual Nature

The 12 steps bring into sharp relief the power and the limits of the intellectual nature of people with an addiction. Step 1 involves your intellectual nature. You are meant to admit your powerlessness over alcohol, other drugs or gambling, and also your unmanageability. Admission is an intellectual activity. It can be private or public. As *addicts* you can admit privately your powerlessness and unmanageability, while publicly denying it, due to false pride. There are two fundamental principles here.

(1) As people with an addiction you cannot do anything about your addiction until you admit it at an intellectual level. (Step 1)

(2) As people with an addiction you cannot do anything about your addiction just by admitting it at an intellectual level. (Steps 2 to 12)

You need to move to spiritual and emotional levels. The truth is that most of you privately admitted your addiction long before you publicly admitted it. And you publicly admitted it long before you did anything about it. You used or drank or gambled long after you knew the disastrous consequences that would follow. Intellectual admission of addiction only, simply means you will eventually use and drink and bet *anyway*.¹

The emotional and spiritual work you have to do in Steps 2 to 12 can be summed up in one word: 'acceptance'. Acceptance is spiritual. First you admit. Then you accept. Once you serenely accept that you cannot change the fact of your addiction, *you* can courageously go about changing all the things within yourselves that you can change and need to change in order to live with the unchangeable fact of your addiction. This fundamental truth is repeated at every 12 Step meeting through the Serenity prayer.

(B) What is the difference for you between admission and acceptance of your addiction? Where are you now?

Belief Systems And Emotions

Emotional nature and intellectual nature are different from each other, yet they greatly affect each other. Whatever you think has some effect on your feelings, and whatever you feel has some effect on your thoughts. A very relevant linkage between your intellectual and emotional natures is the connection between your belief systems and your emotions. More specifically here we are concerned with particular thoughts that become bound up into your total belief system, and the impact that the total belief system has on your feelings.

Throughout childhood you developed habitual ways of thinking about certain situations and experiences. At that time these ways of thinking may have been conscious, but later they became habitual, or automatic, or unconscious. Eventually, they became fairly fixed into belief systems, which you took into adulthood and applied to here-and-now situations. Different models of therapy and of personality development describe these ways of thinking in different ways. It doesn't matter what words we use, but to keep this discussion simple, we will call them 'lies'. When habitual here-and-now actions continuously result in self-destructive consequences, it is probably because the total belief system contains too many lies. We explore the most common of these lies in Part B.

Choices And Consequences

Your journey through life to here-and-now caused you to be what you are. More accurately, your *responses* to certain events and situations in childhood life resulted in certain ways of thinking and *consequently* feeling and *consequently* acting, all of which became habitual. When as an adult you react to here-and-now situations in accord with these habits, you recognise yourself as being “just the way I am”. The habitual actions follow the habitual feelings, which follow the habitual thoughts.

At the centre of all this is the belief system that contains lies. If, for example, any of you experienced frequent childhood taunts from significant adults that you were stupid, then you may carry that belief into adulthood. You may then see the world as an endless series of situations in which you are made to feel stupid. You may then *act* as if you are stupid although you are not.

To take another example, if any of you were sexually abused as children, you may form a belief about yourself that you are little more than sexual beings, and you may see the world as presenting constant sexual temptation.

To take a third example, if any of you were childhood victims of frequent abuse, you may come to see yourself here-and-now as a victim, and consequently see the world as frequently and unfairly victimising you. The examples are endless.

(C) Are you beginning to recognise some of the lies that have developed in your belief system? What are they for you?

What we need to emphasise here is that (until recovery) you don't recognise these lies as lies. They seem to be true. In summary, you came to believe that the cause of your problems was the world outside of you, as *opposed to your response to that world*. You wrongly came to believe that the world was in need of changing, not you.

The tragedy here is that when this happened, you lost control. You transferred responsibility for the way you behaved away from yourselves and onto the world. Now, in recovery, your task is to take back responsibility and control. You need to accept that you have to change yourself, not the world. As you do this, your perception of the world changes. **You change yourself and therefore your perception of the world.**

The trouble is that many of you are not motivated to change yourselves until the consequences of these false beliefs become so costly that you decide to examine them. For example, while the lie that the world continuously victimises you 'works' for you, you can angrily wage a war against the world. While you do so, you can ignore yourself. When and only when, that war has led to desperation, you may become motivated to focus on yourself. Then you can confront the lies that you believed about yourself and the world.

Until that time of desperation, your lives become a continuous series of events that seem to prove the truth of the lies because you don't notice circumstances that disprove the lies. You also tend to manufacture (without realising it) situations that provide additional 'evidence' of the truth of the lies. Because of the way you see yourselves, you see the world in ways that reinforce or confirm the lies. In simple terms, the lies become the focus around which you make 'sense' of reality. You have used your intellectual nature to do this. It is at this point in recovery that you can become confused.

Your Emotional Nature



Part B - Recovery: What Are You Going To Do About It?

Lies

In part A of this module we explored the development of lies within belief systems. We even identified some particular lies that some came to believe. We saw how this development of lies within belief systems is part of the way you respond to the world around you. Now you need to remember that; **your responses are your responsibility.**

Accordingly, the time has come for you to recognise some of the lies that are common to most and may be within *your* belief system.

(1) The Perfectionist Lie

Many of you set goals that you cannot reach and then punish yourselves for not reaching them. If by some fluke you reach your goals, you simply shift the goal post further on and dismiss the achievement as worthless. It is only by doing this that you can conform to your self-image, namely that you are worthless. That is the tape that is constantly playing in your heads. You punish yourselves accordingly. The lie is not that you think that you can be perfect. The lie is that you usually think you ought to achieve something *more* than you actually do achieve.

(D) Are you ever satisfied with your achievements?

(2) The People-Pleaser Lie

If you are a people-pleaser, you turn everyone you meet into your higher power. You only feel good about yourself when you believe that others feel good about you. And to *make* other people feel good about you, you usually do whatever *others* want and seldom what *you* want. People-pleasers end up becoming applause meters. Your self-esteem depends on the other people to whom you give away your power, applauding you.

(E) Do you people-please?

(3) The Avoidance Lie

If this lie is in your belief system, you ignore your problems, run away from them, minimise them, decide to fix them tomorrow, or try to give them away to someone else to fix for you. In short, you avoid your problems. The trouble is your problems are persistent. They demand attention. And they can become very, very demanding when they don't get that attention. They don't go away. They grow larger. The funny thing is that these problems only demand attention, not solutions. You need to work on your problems. You don't have to always find solutions. Sometimes you can. Sometimes you can't. In the meantime you need to at least face your problems.

(F) Are you now facing your problems or avoiding them?

(4) The Control Lie (Aka The 'My Way' Lie)

Some of you need to be in control, because then you don't have to trust in the judgments or actions of others. There are two results to the lie that says things must go 'My Way'. First, they don't go your way and you get frustrated. Second, things do go your way and then you push your luck until they don't; *then* you get frustrated. In other words, you keep trying to control *until* you reach frustration. Successful control is never enough.

Now here's the funny bit: what you are *really* seeking is not the control, but the frustration! Even when you do get your own way, you derive little satisfaction from this. You get your fix, your adrenalin rush, from the frustration. This is because deep down your need to control is really about your need *not to have to trust*. And when you reach frustration, *then* you can justify in your head (your intellectual nature), that the people you were trying to control really couldn't be trusted! Think about it. The antidote is to go against your nature and trust *anyway*.

(G) Do you realise that your 'control issue' is really a 'trust issue'? Can you see how getting frustrated with people has enabled you to avoid having to trust people?

(5) The Blame Lie

Some of you tend to blame others for the feelings that you don't want to have. The lie is the belief that others can ever be responsible for your feelings. They can't. The truth is your emotional responses are caused by what *you think* of the words and actions of others. It is the thought processes going on *inside of you* that cause your feelings. The point is you can't blame things *outside of you* for your feelings because your *feelings* are caused by your *thoughts*. The lesson is to own the thoughts as well as the resulting feelings. The good thing about this is that it is easier to change your feelings when you *first* change your thoughts.

(H) Do you see that your thoughts lead to your feelings, and that you can't blame others for your feelings?

(6) The Performance Lie

Think about the sports cliché that says “May the best person win”. Wouldn’t it be better if this cliché was varied to suit the occasion, so that we would say “may the best runner win”, or “may the best tennis player win”, or “may the best boxer win”? At least then we would not confuse the quality of the runner with the quality of the person. We would not be confusing self-worth with performance or achievement. This is a cultural thing.

The sporting cliché illustrates the basic problem with this lie, namely it is all about some of you comparing yourselves with others, particularly your achievements, and measuring your self-worth accordingly. The antidote is in four parts:

1. To realise that self-worth comes from within, not without.
2. To accept that people are all equal but different in the eyes of God, who gave them different abilities in different areas.
3. For you to accept the whole of yourselves, not just the aspect that you employ to compare yourselves with others and then to put yourselves down.
4. The fundamental task is for all people - not just addicts - to become the best they can according to their unique potential as human beings, and not to try to be better human beings than anyone else.

(I) Are you basing your self-esteem on what you achieve or fail to achieve compared to others?

(7) The Life-Should-Be-Easy Lie

This is another lie based on comparisons. Some of you look at others and see how easy they have it, and become jealous. Of course you don't see the whole of anyone else's life, but that doesn't stop you running to comparison judgments. The fact is that life is difficult for everybody, each in its own way. Each way is not always obvious. Princes, paupers and pop-stars all jump off bridges to destroy the life that is not as easy as it should be.

The antidote to this lie is best summed up by the opening words of Scott Peck's *The Road Less Travelled*:

Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult - once we truly understand and accept it - then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.

(J) Have you yet accepted that your life is always going to be difficult, or are you still fighting?

(8) The Magnification Lie

This is where you build things up until one last thing is the straw that breaks the camel's back. This is also where some *addicts* build mountains out of molehills. This is where *you* magnify things out of proportion. The lie is that you convince yourselves that *somebody else* is doing all these things *to* you, and that you are the victim of *their* actions. The truth is that *you* do these things to *yourselves*. The solution is to ask yourselves all the time "How important is it?", and to make a *choice against* magnifying things so that they seem bigger than they really are.

(K) Are you regularly getting things out of proportion by choosing to build unrelated annoyances onto each other?

(9) The Personalisation Lie (Aka The Shipboard Lie)

This refers to all those annoyances and frustrations 'out there' that you unnecessarily 'take on board' and personalise. At an emotional level you decide that all the wrong things that others do are done to you. You take *personally* other people's shortcomings and issues. The solution is simple: admit what you have been doing and choose not to do it. Choose not to take it on board. Your ship is already too crowded.

(L) Do you take on board other people's stuff? Who gets stuffed when you do?

(10) The Polarisation Lie (Aka The Black-And-White Lie)

Imagine a Case Worker saying to a participant “You are too self-centred”, and the participant replying “But I don’t want to be a people-pleaser!” Or the Case Worker says to another participant “You are too cynical and negative about the program”, and the participant responds, “But I don’t want to be a program robot!”. These are examples of polarisation, or black-white thinking where there is no middle ground or balance; there are only extremes.

The polarisation lie can be a great excuse to avoid changing and growing. The reality is that there is a lot of middle ground. There is no need to go to extremes. If you go there, you need to return to the middle ground. That is the solution to this lie. Some of you also apply this lie to the world around you. You put people and things into extreme categories that you see as either extremely good or extremely bad. Again you need to get some balance.

(M) Do you need balance?

(11) The Narrow-Focus Lie (Aka The Trees-And-Forest Lie)

Here you don’t see the forest because the trees are in the way. People with an addiction are very good at this. You focus only on your deficiencies, or other people’s deficiencies, or the world’s deficiencies. You don’t notice the rest of us, or the rest of others, or the rest of the world. You focus on the one criticism in a sea of compliments. You lose sight of the Big Picture. You use the few things that you cannot do in order to avoid doing all the things that you can. There are many variations on this lie.

Even these notes can be turned into a form of the narrow-focus lie. You can take one part out of context. Or you can focus on one module to the exclusion of the rest. You can, for example, focus too narrowly on the work you have to do on your spiritual nature to the exclusion of your other natures. Or you can become so hooked on looking at yourselves that you forget your relationships. Or you see ‘doing group’ as just reading the notes and doing the homework rather than changing yourselves and the way you live, one day at a time.

(N) What is your version of the narrow focus lie? (Don’t focus on just one!)

(12) The Denial-By-Admission Lie

This is one of the most subtle yet destructive lies in early recovery. It involves admitting a defect or shortcoming but then doing nothing else about it. It is as if all you have to do to remove your defects is to admit them. You subtly deny the need to change now by saying, “Yeah, I need to work on that”, meaning “I will work on that *later*”.

This confuses awareness with action. To say “I have a problem with anger” does not in itself cause anger to go away. To say “That’s just the way I am” keeps people just the way they have always been. And the way you as *addicts* coped with the way you’ve always been is to drug, drink and gamble. “If nothing changes, nothing changes”.

This is where you use your intellectual natures to avoid recovery by saying all the right things but doing nothing, by talking the talk but not walking the walk. The solution is as obvious as the problem is subtle. You need to turn admission into action. Denial-by-admission is your twelfth and last lie (what a coincidence!). The most destructive and frequent expression of this lie is to admit the truth underneath any or all of the other lies, yet do nothing about them.

(O) Have you read about some of the above lies and said, “Yeah, I will work on that later”? Is that your pattern in life?

Belief Systems Re-Visited

We suggest to each of you that, as a person in early recovery, a large part of your total belief system will be made up of many of these lies. What you have to do now is identify and correct the lies within your belief system and so change your belief system. This is not as easy as it sounds. The beginning of the process might be to work through this week's homework. Alas, this project of changing your belief system will not be completed in a week.

A belief system resists change. If you try to correct just one lie, your whole belief system will work against that correction until before long you once again believe that lie as truth. Constant vigilance and constant work are the keys to changing your total belief system as a whole into one that is more self-fulfilling.

This is all basic to the philosophy behind the 12 Step Program. We repeat here some quotations that we used at the start of the module. Perhaps now you will see their relevance.

- “We have found that we had no choice except to completely change our old ways of thinking or go back to using.”
- “The solution to our problem is a profound change in our thinking and our behaviour. We need to change how we perceive the world and alter our role in it. We need to change our attitude.”
- “Faced with alcoholic destruction, we soon became as open minded on spiritual matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect alcohol was a great persuader.”



Keeping a journal is a good idea here. This can be part of your Step 10 inventory. Record in your journal (A) the events that happen to you, (B) your 'self-talk', i.e. what you mentally tell yourself about the event, and (C) your emotional response *to your self-talk*.

Recognising (A) is relatively easy. Recognising (C) is also relatively easy except that - until now - you might have seen your emotional response as being to the event, rather than to your self-talk. Recognising (B) is the hard bit. You will tend to overlook it. What you need to do now is thoroughly examine your self-talk and record it in your journal. As you do this you will discover many of the lies that we have discussed above. Try it!

Once you identify the ABC procedure described in the last paragraph, you will need to add (D) and (E). (D) is the truth that replaces each of the lies contained in the self-talk (B) that was your initial response to event (A). (E) is the emotional response you observe in yourself as you undertake the corrections in your self-talk.