

Uncovery

Reflections on my own recovery process
1988 – 2008

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Introduction

Enormous strides have been made over the past 20 years to bring addictions recovery efforts out of the closet, out of shame and denial, and out from the basements where recovery once exclusively took place. We have much to be proud and excited about in our healing from alcohol and other drug addictions, as individuals and as groups. I am grateful for the presence of such recovery activities in my own addictions recovery. We also know that it is not time to rest on our laurels. We all know there is still much to do, especially in the area of prevention, so that the addictions tree cannot take root once again.

One of those things still to do involves coming out from behind a kind of denial concerning the stance to life that led to the addictions epidemic in the first place. Discussion of this is still not taking place in our movements. I have been proud to be an advocate for addictions recovery over the past 20 years or so, first in my own recovery, and later in other recovery movements. I have also experienced some of the subtle lies by omission in the recovery situations I've been part of. I could not remain in those groups due to their denial of the larger social causes and meaning of addiction when it reaches epidemic proportions.

Large-scale addictions phenomena are a signal that the human endeavor has forgotten the core essence of its meaning and purpose. It is an error signal that seeks to re-direct our attention to what it fundamentally means to be human. Today it is calling our attention to information, knowledge and progress addiction, as well as to the materialism arising from such an imbalance. Carried to extremes, endless information, knowledge and progress as ends in themselves are not a true meaning and purpose for human life. In my opinion, this is what the addictions epidemic is telling us: contemporary life lacks authentic meaning, purpose and spirituality in its expression of humanness. Our infatuation with Western science and technology is one of the strongest root causes. Confronting the "Don't Talk" rule about this offers a new avenue to understand the addictions epidemic in a holistic manner.

What follows is some writing on my own recovery journey, as well as an airing of some areas of discussion that I think are still behind closed doors. It is writing that was unsharable in the recovery situations I was part of. How to open those closed doors? I think William Shakespeare said it best: "A word to the wise is sufficient."

Uncovering

My own addictions recovery has been a spiritual waking-up process. Looking back on it, I used addictive substances to hide in fear from my own self-discovery. Because I went through my addictions phase to remain covered up, “recovery” for me was more like an “un-covey” experience. For me, the word “recovery” has always suggested getting back to an imagined previous condition of health or wellness, which I knew I never had. I didn’t want to cover up again (“re-cover”) but wanted to take off the destructive ego-armor that kept me from realizing who or what I really am.

I understood my chemical substance misuse as an expression of my own spiritual confusion and delusion, never an illness or a disease in the ordinary medical or psychological sense. I never felt that I was “ill” or “sick,” but rather that I had an addictions problem. For me, thinking or feeling this way allows a more focused or functional use of language than the nebulous use of “disease” or “illness,” which I knew I did not have. To say that addicts or alcoholics are ill or have a disease has always struck me as unclear thinking. What it really means, I feel, is that an addict or an alcoholic is not a moral reprobate, not a bad person, and not a failed human being. Nor is he or she a criminal. Those are stigmas from an earlier, more ignorant time in human society. They are not true and do not take us forward. To mis-language the situation (in my opinion) by using terms like “illness” or “disease,” is to use medical model language but without the physical evidence that the medical model requires. At the least, “disease-like” would be a better way to think about the addictive stress response.

Using the term “addictive stress response” promises to be a more accurate label than “disease.” Its use helps us to look at the *positive* role of addictions as message carrier in deep human healing, and even human evolution. My opinion is that it carries the message for the dominant society that our stance to life has fallen into hubris^{*}. A holistic response to large-scale addictive behaviors would include interest in the causes and meaning of what we are going through, as well as problem solving. Understanding the message is as important as solving the immediate problem, which might only be a symptom of something more, after all.

Until simple, definitive physical evidence for the cause of an addictions disease is found, if ever, using the *addictive stress response* as a hypothesis, rather than the medical model of disease, is a better choice. It allows us to look at a collection of many factors in understanding how and why a person may become addicted or an addictions epidemic may take place.

The addictive stress response in an individual, or in a society, is a constellation of many causes. These include possible biological predisposition, as well as social, religious, political, economic, cultural and personal sensitivity factors, including other situational and environmental causes. They can result in addictions behavior when they fall out of active, dynamic balance and self-checking with one another. It is my opinion that the non-biological factors are easily as important in individual and mass addiction phenomena as the yet unproven biological

(scientifically determined) ones. Further, I feel it is a red herring to think that finding causes based in the findings of “hard science” will be “the” answer to problems of chemical addictions. To me, this kind of thinking is a further subtle extension into the hubristic mindset of contemporary life. Responses from techno-science, such as pharmaceutical vaccines, may have a role in working with biological predisposition; but their use should not obscure other causes based in deviation from healthy human values.

I am grateful to have been able to assist in the Native American Wellbriety Movement as part of my own uncovering journey. The term “Wellbriety” means to abstain from chemical substance misuse and then go beyond into true healing and wellness—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. For me, Wellbriety and Uncovering are certainly close kin. While helping in the Wellbriety movement, I began to realize that younger Native Americans don’t understand addictions as a disease in the way that the concept is used in mainstream society. They understand it as a result of institutional racism and the outcome of historic intergenerational trauma from racial and cultural oppression. This expresses itself as despair and lack of opportunity among their peoples. I feel this is a culture-specific outlook that resonates well with the notion of addictive stress response.

From the beginning, I understood my own addictive stress as a teacher who was there to help me to uncover or wake up. As a white male techno-science professional whose human identity was invested in the mindset of Western science, I suffered from hubris along with many in the dominant society. I benefited greatly from reading Anne Schafe’s book, *When Society Becomes and Addict* in the early 1990’s. It helped place my own chemical misuse into a wider context. It suggested to me that despite its obvious brilliance, our very culture had become one of addiction. The addictive impulse had come to wend its way through all our institutions and our very stance to life. I was moved when the Native American wellness community adopted as its rallying cry, *Our Culture is Prevention*. This is a statement of the healing strength of traditional Native cultures, which have been so wounded by historic events and modern life as well. By contrast, I could see that for Euro-American society, *Our culture is addiction* might be closer to the truth. This is something I have seen for myself—it is not a statement necessarily made by Native Americans.

The writing process has been a constant companion throughout my addictions recovery process and its many events along the way. I found that through writing I could say things that sometimes were “forbidden” in the group recovery situations in which I took part. I soon discovered that there were “right” things to say, and “wrong” things to say in group recovery situations. The group-ego was always very much alive. For me, after a point the mainstream recovery group ego was as destructive as the individual egotism that we now know is one source of addictions. Ordinary recovery groups often ignored or shamed the very things I needed to explore in order to uncover and wake up. I am certainly grateful for the help of the popular recovery approaches in my own early recovery. They do save lives and they helped me, too. But as my needs became those of *uncovering*, I found I was blocked and had to move on.

The writing tool gradually became more and more important in clearing out my own addictions issues because some of my addictions healing needs and perceptions were different than others. The prose style in writing allows healing to take place in some ways, and poetry in other ways. My own uncovering journey took a path that passed through 1) active substance addiction or misuse; 2) early recovery; 3) mid-recovery; 4) long-term recovery; and finally, 4) recovered. Some of the writing I did has nothing to do explicitly with addictions. But all of it contributes to the uncovering journey through which I became a “recovered person,” and more to the point, an addictions survivor or an addictions victor. This can also be called radical recovery. I continue to write as a joyous expression of my ongoing uncovering journey through life.

What follows are examples of uncovering writing from over the years. In these, I could “say the unsayable.” They were written even as I was involved in the more conventional approaches to addictions recovery, first as a participant and later as an advocate in the Wellbriety Movement. I benefited from, and faithfully supported those processes, as I do today. I felt fellowship with the suffering and recovery success of my brothers and sisters in recovery, as I do today. But I have also felt alone in my perception of the deeper implications and meaning of the addictions epidemic for all of us. I was, and am, saddened that there is no room to discuss the deeper causes and meaning of large-scale addiction within the fellowship of the mainstream recovery community.

The addictions epidemic is here to guide us as human beings in both individual and social or cultural survival. It’s here because the materialistic, progress-addicted contemporary orientation to life is an expression of devolution. It’s here because of the unbalanced secularization and “technicalization” of society. To me, response to the addictions epidemic means more than individual recovery and happiness. There is a much larger interconnected social, cultural and environmental healing journey taking place. Awareness of this is squelched by the no-talk rule within the addictions recovery community. This de-facto no-talk rule is a viewpoint that could change as a deep, radical recovery dawns. The time may be ripe to ask, “Which parts of a society strengthen the ‘addictive immune system’ (prevention), and which weaken it?”

I offer this collection to encourage others to voice a full range of feelings in their own deep healing. I offer it so that a more contemplative way of life might dawn for us all. None of these writings is meant to contradict the more conventional recovery sentiments for any particular person. “Uncovering” provides another note to blend into the harmony, allowing a way for wakefulness to enter into the addictions healing journey.

*Richard Simonelli
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April, 2008*

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Hubris:

Arrogant pride or presumption. In Greek tragedy, excessive pride towards, or defiance of the gods, leading to nemesis. The excessive pride or ambition that usually leads to the downfall of a hero in classical tragedy. Becoming “bigger than one’s god.” When the arrogance of hubris arises to excess in a society, something automatically comes into being to counter the excessive pride and so bring the system back into balance. That situation is called *nemesis*. In general, nemesis is a positive attribute of self-regulating systems. Large scale mass addiction phenomena may be the nemesis naturally arising to confront the misuse of the techno-scientific values, behaviors and ways of life destabilizing social orders and now characterizing contemporary societies worldwide. In that sense, the mass addictions phenomenon is a positive attribute calling not only for immediate problem solving (which is essential), but for the understanding of, and response to its deeper meaning and purpose.

I–Uncovery

We came staggering out of the smoky wreck
beat up pretty bad.
We came out wrecked and leveled
humbled by the sheer stubbornness of ourselves.
It was our undoing,
but it was also our teacher,
and those who resisted had an especially hard time.
Some disappeared.
Some died.

Now, in recovery, we recognize old friends,
Some are shadows of their former selves
the hurtfulness gone or going away.
We meet tentatively,
hesitant,
but anxious to know each other—
 like toddlers with expectant faces
 meeting in a playground
 wanting to play.

Recovery is a bridge on which we find our hearts,
it is a season, a passage,
a ceremony which we celebrate by working very hard
and learning to play.

Beyond recovery lies uncovery,
Uncovery—our flowering as a human being,
Uncovery—
 the journey of our lives.

We meet again in uncovery
Older, kinder, cautious—
It's good to see you my old friend!

In kindness let us share both hard and happy places;
In kindness let us leave something for the young;
In kindness let us treat the environment with care;
beyond recovery—

Uncovery—
Uncovery...the journey of our lives.

–1988

2–Sobriety

Six men
 sit in a circle drinking Scotch.
 Their bellies are warmed,
 their reason softened
 congeniality, hopes and wishes pour forth.

Hard liquor
 fueled the conquest of North America;
 Manifest Destiny and the bottle went hand in hand.
 But these men are sons of sons of sons of Manifest Destiny—
 They wish no harm,
 they wish to understand their past;
 they sit in a circle experimenting with some of the old Native ways,
 they are sincere,
 they seek authenticity:
The dark water awakens warmth that often won't come of its own.

The bottle is tricky—an ultimate coyote.
 At a later time, perhaps, drink can return
 but now
 Anything achieved on the alcohol road will explode.

May our circles be simple.
 May our words be true, no matter who they challenge.
 May we open to each other's differences.
 May we find intimacy with a sober heart and mind.

–1991

3–Beyond Recovery

Recovery from substance abuse and process addictions like sex or overwork is a process filled with many meaningful events. Perhaps the most important event in that process is the moment when it is realized that one is recovered. Being recovered from substance or process addictions is to be healed from all-too-human habits. But being recovered does not necessarily mean that a person is *cured* of biochemical and psycho-emotional vulnerabilities to the particular substance or activity. We can be recovered and healed but not cured. This means that we may never be able to ingest that substance again. Or it may mean that we must manage our involvements in certain activities very carefully, otherwise we will experience negative results for ourselves and those around us.

It is dangerous and limiting to think of oneself as always in recovery or always recovering. To adopt that idea may lead to a kind of arrested development as a total human being. Beyond recovery from substance abuse and other addictions lies *uncovery*, which is just a way of saying that the journey of self-knowledge and involvement with the entire range of phenomena goes on and on. The term “phenomena” refers to all that happens in the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual areas of life—in other words, the created world.

Uncovery means that we live with open hearts and good minds. Attaching to or fixating on parts of the journey that once helped us, or even saved our lives, can also lead to arrested development. Uncovery is a constant process of releasing and letting go. The events marking the journey of uncovery are realizations that we have let go of something. They are as important as the process. One of those events is letting go of recovery.

“Letting go of recovery” isn’t license to fall back into patterns of substance or process misuse once again. We must “forgive us our relapses,” but also notice that the harm caused to ourselves and others from relapses gets worse as we get older.

As we remain loyal and faithful to friends still suffering from substance or process addiction, and as we provide role modeling and recovery advocacy, we must do so without being caught by the label or concept of recovery. In Japan they say, “The sword that saves a person, slays him; and the sword that slays a person saves him.” Healing is very mysterious and it can turn on you. Uncovery or healing is always new, always fresh and always challenging. If it becomes codified, rigid, dogmatic or fear-based it is no longer a wellness process.

Our greatest gift or offering to healing from chemical dependency and other addictions is example. “Free at last! Free at last!! Great God almighty, I’m free at last!” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said as he expressed gratitude for where life had taken him. Free at last! Free to help our brothers and sisters still suffering from addictions; but also free to move beyond being addicted to the recovery process itself.

–1996

4–Addiction

Addiction is how Reality gets our attention.

Addiction is the next generation of computers and scientific marvels,
which you can't find livelihood without.

Addiction is our love affair with “the technology,”
the next electronic gadget,
and with business,
which makes it all happen.

Addiction is our mindset, worldview, and outlook,
which is invisible
because the dominant society is culturally self-important.

When society becomes an addict,
it protects its addiction by calling it a non-addiction,
by calling it progress and human evolution.

In the Internet,
informational technology,
and in the current way of life ,
we have the greatest opportunity to wake up
because these are some of the greatest addictions,
cunningly promoted as positive change.

Addiction is how Reality gets our attention.

Are we listening?

–1997

5–A Hard Awakening

If you drank too much,
learn from it.
Anything that can open up one's gate
is elixir,
not disease.

–2004

6 – Healing from Science

I regard myself as completely recovered and healed from my own previous chemical substance addictions. I am no longer “in recovery.” I’m recovered, and gratefully free from the use of mind-altering substances. The 12 Step programs and approaches in which I participated—worked! But I don’t think I’m immune to the proven laws of addiction. I know chemical addictions can be a recurring phenomenon. If I should relapse, then I will be in recovery once again. Yet now I am thankfully recovered from substance misuse. But I am by no means recovered from the thought patterns and stance to life found in Western science and technology, my previous career. I could not properly begin my own healing journey from substance misuse until I looked at how I internalized the skeptical, rational, logical, intellectual, conceptual, and power-and-control oriented thought patterns of the technology career I was part of. I could not really begin my healing journey until I walked away from some of the human thinking errors embedded in the Western approach to knowledge. I regard myself as *healing from science*.

Healing from science means that I have had to examine the materialistic, rational, logical, intellectual, superior, male-oriented and fundamentally separative mindset that I inherited from my training and subsequent career in engineering. Western science would not be possible without the intense *subject-object* separation it imposes on the world. The popular notion of “ego” really means separation. If we have a problem of “ego” in our lives, it is exactly the same thinking pattern that Western science and technology operate from. I was part of the sputnik generation of the late 1950’s, inspired by the false promise of a fundamentally better world through science and technology. I internalized the stance of Western science as a personal identity, not realizing that what we call “science” is only a tool or a system of knowledge—not a proper purpose or a healthy orientation to one’s life in human terms. It is only one way of knowing—and a narrow one at that. I was not alone in this. When I finally left that profession I was horrified to find that much of the world was addicting itself to science and its fruits. I was shocked to see so many others attracted by the so-called Western scientific thinking pattern. When we internalize the skepticism, literalness, and narrowness of the Western scientific method, it injures authentic faith; loss of authentic faith is a cause of the addictions epidemic. If we are addicted to scientific materialism and the externalized Western knowledge ideologies, is it any wonder that chemical substance addictions on a large scale would follow? Is it any surprise that the truth of this insight would be fiercely denied in our society?

There are possibilities for bringing more inclusive, holistic (four directions), and indigenous perspectives to science and technology in the future—and that is a great hope for the future. Four directions science and technology means that the four perspectives of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual reality must be welcome in science and technology at all levels. A fifth direction of *culture* also belongs in a fully holistic science and technology. To bring science and engineering into balance, practitioners in those fields must themselves desire to become whole persons. “Healing from science” means healing the scientist, it means healing the engineer. So few science professionals know that healing is necessary for themselves. As it stands now, every

person who “believes” in Western science and technology with what amounts to a religious fervor is a prime contributor to the addictions epidemic. This belief fuels the harm that drives so many to addictive behavior by contributing to the overbearing materialism and consumerism that engulfs us all. This unexamined belief deprives individuals of wholeness. It creates knowledge and progress addiction and compulsion, which is such a hallmark of this age.

One of the profoundest notions to come into general awareness in the past forty years or so is that of *interconnectedness*. Most of us now know that all parts of our world are connected and related in one way or another. The phenomena of globalization, environmental disasters, and the availability of four directions knowledge and wisdom systems that were unheard of in the mid 20th Century West have brought this truth to light. At every level, Reality is relational, interdependent and whole. What is done to one part of the system affects every other part. So is it any mystery that when the earth is dominated by the unbalanced, arrogant and secular Western knowledge system, another aspect of our world would scream out against that domination? The truth of interconnectedness makes it so. It was my own discovery that the addictions epidemic is one aspect of human life screaming out against the domination of scientific materialism and scientific secularism in every quarter.

The great task of the next generations must be to bring the Western approach to life into a healthy balance. It is the Western stance to life that creates the addictions epidemic as we now know it. The fundamental belief in *separation* that is key to the Western Worldview and its science may have been useful in an earlier part of human history; but it has outlived its usefulness. The notion of *separation* is untrue at the level of system complexity we are now facing. The great task of the next generations must be to integrate Western science, including its scientists and engineers, into a sustainable orientation to all life. A balanced and humbled science and technology of the future has much to offer human society. And that will come to pass if we re-orient our priorities to healing, wellness, harmony, balance and sustainability. But there is no way to sugar coat the truth: as it stands now, our unbalanced, strictly secular approach to knowledge is a crime against life.

I regard myself as still in healing from the Euro-centric Western Worldview. The source of the hubris and harm fueling the addictions epidemic in today’s society lies there. And so do the deep roots of my own substance addiction. For myself, I am not anti-science and technology; they are simply tools we must all tolerate. But I certainly see that the authentic meaning, purpose and peace the world is seeking will not come from the emphasis on technology and technological thinking that engulfs us now. I do not put science and technology on a pedestal as so many do. Rather, I look for a time when scientists and technologists themselves will personally join a path of awakening, freedom and love in some form. Only when that happens will Western science gradually evolve into an indigenous or holistic science. When that happens, the deep immaturity of our knowledge system will come to its own childhood’s end. This is my personal story, but I’ll bet this understanding might prove to be useful for a few more of us if permission were given to look at things in this way.

Richard Simonelli, 2005

7-You

When you look into a microscope
you are looking for you.

When you look through a telescope
far out into the universe,
you are still looking for you.

And when you share your knowledge with colleagues
or with society at large,
you are simply finding *yourself* in compassion.

Science unearths fact--
 brilliant fact,
 hard-won fact,
 clever and cunning factual information.

But all the facts in the world do not express truth.
Something unseen, intangible, and non-material
must knit facts together
before there is truth,
before there is meaning,
or before there is wellness and healing.

You are the unseen reality
needed to knit facts together into meaning and healing.

You in self-surrender,
You in your openhearted compassion,
You in your caring and peaceful intention,
You in your silence,
 and in your wordless love.

-2006

8—From *Reflections on Non-Theism*

We are entering a time when we will be able to meet our spirituality in terms and ways that are affirming of a sacred world. Each person will have his or her own understanding of the sacred because an important focus of life will be to find “God as you understand him (or her),” as the 12 Step programs say. Each personal and individual affirmation of the sacred will then begin to grow a healthy root system for both human and environmental life on earth. For some, this may be described as “non-theism” in the sense that true understanding of the spiritual mystery—what many call “God”—cannot be named, codified, conceptualized, or pinned down. For myself, I understand God as no God at all in the theistic sense, *without taking on the spiritual denial usually associated with atheism or agnosticism*. As soon as one “believes” in duality, one can “believe in God” in the exclusive and sometimes hurtful way that term can be used. But what if one sees through duality in the first place? Reality is interconnected, integrated and whole. As the future unfolds, many will come to understand the names of the sacred in their own unique ways. And a few will jettison all reliance on theological labels, realizing that reliance on words just obscures the clarity and profundity of what simply is.

—2006

9–Non-theism

I'm not religious in the sense of adhering to a particular social institution that speaks for spirituality. Mine is a non-theistic experience of the sacred. I don't utilize the notion of "God" in my own spiritual life at all—but this is not atheism or agnosticism, it's non-theism. I deeply respect what the theistic use of "God" signifies and I do try to reach people through the use of "God language" whenever I can because, by in large, ours is a culture of theism. For myself, it is a great gift to be free of the boundaries and limitations of ordinary theism. These limitations exist only because of how we conceptualize, think of, or imagine what the word "God" may signify. They are **our** limitations and they keep us in spiritual ignorance or confusion. It is a great gift to awaken to the contemplative, non-dual God, which removes all conceptual limitations. It is a gift to discover one's personal relationship with a non-separate God—for me, personal without personification. It is truly a gift of Grace to abide in non-separation. We are the God we seek.

–2007

10—Not God?

How could I think that I am God? Isn't such a thought the height of arrogance, egotism and blasphemy? Isn't it the outrageous epitome of non-humility and self-centeredness? Doesn't such a sentiment offend Christians, Jews and Islamists to the point of incredulity and dismissal of a person who would speak that way? Some would ignore such a person or even want to kill them. At the popular level, the monotheistic God of Western style religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam—is taken to be an entity “out there,” separate from its creation, “down here.” Subtler understandings of what the word “God” might signify are held by contemplative aspects of Western religions; but at the predominant popular level, which permeates most of Western spirituality, we are hopelessly separate from God *because we define it that way*.

Obviously, I can't be the Christian, Jewish or Islamic God. It would be blasphemous to even think that way. But is that because of any inherent truth, or is it because of how God is thought of, conceptualized and proclaimed in popular Western monotheism? Isn't the separation from God, rampant in Western style religions, the outcome of its own teachings and theology rather than anything inherent in direct experience of the most sacred?

A miracle took place in the healing of alcoholics in the America of the 1930's. It is a well-known story that a man named Bill Wilson was not able to stop drinking until he walked away from how the God of his own Christian religion was portrayed and had the ultimate courage to experience the sacred mystery in a manner that made personal sense to him. When he was able to do that, only then could he find the surrender that allowed him to begin healing from his own alcoholic tendencies. The phrase coming from his conversion experience became “God as you understand him.”

Some of us needed to break free of the dogma of Western religions as understood at the popular level. To have direct experience of the spiritual mystery in our own terms. At that point, all separation from the mystery vanishes. One is then free to use “God language,” or not. One is also free to say, “I am God,” meaning something very different than egoism or an egotistical statement. Even more, one is free to say *I Am* without any need to say “God” or anything else afterward. *I Am* that which is. I simply am. There is no need for God talk at all.

It may be offensive and counterproductive to interfaith and inter-religious communication to speak in this manner because Western religions are anchored in separative beliefs. And that is a good enough reason not to speak in a non-separative way in those circles. It will be met with derision. To understand such a thing, much less say it, is taken as inflammatory language in the religious West. Inflammatory language threatens relationship building when the subject of that language is a different experience of reality than is held by your counterpart. The secret to interfaith and cross-tradition communication is relationship building and respect. We must be free to speak, but also wise enough to know when, or if, to speak.

In the same tradition established by Bill Wilson and others in the 1930's, they say, "You are *Not God!*" to warn those with alcohol problems against the egoism that leads to drinking relapses. "Not God" refers to egoism, not spiritual truth. Of course one is not God in the sense that Western religions understand God. The theology defines and teaches it that way. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy. But to allow oneself *discovery* of the most sacred without consensus beliefs can lead to interior freedom. Realize the ultimate mystery without separation and come to know first hand. The non-theistic, non-dual god is much closer than we think.

-2007

11–Youless You

Hail to thee, divine metaphor,

You, youless you!

Seeking you, I find me,

You and me, un-separate!

–2007

12–Healing Song

Root by root
Stem by stem
Branch by branch
And bit by bit,
The sacred tree is growing.

Little by little
We heal our hurt,
Our families heal,
And the people again
Become whole.

Afterword

The Meaning and Purpose of Recovery

What is recovery? And more, what is the meaning and purpose of recovery? Certainly, it is to get over slavery to a chemical substance. And certainly, it is to lose the personal unhappiness of drug addiction and the harm it brings to oneself, one's family, friends and everyone associated with the addict or alcoholic. Most certainly, it is to have the sun come out in one's own life again so that we may be happy human beings. But is that enough?

If we stop there and fail to understand the deeper purpose and meaning of addictions recovery for human society, as well as for the natural environment on planet earth, we have not gone far enough. If we stop with the individual and his or her justifiably self-centered needs, we will fail to create a sustainable society even in the wake of our good recovery efforts, individually and together.

Large-scale alcohol and other drug addictions are with us because we in the dominant society have a unbalanced orientation to life and embrace a faulty worldview. It is faulty because it overemphasizes separation. Perhaps it wasn't always this way but we have gotten off-track. Now, there has been a wrong turning in our stance or approach to life, which affects us all as contemporary people. The addictions epidemic is a symptom of that wrong turning. It is with us because a fundamental belief in scientific materialism and loss of both individual and social spirituality leads to despair. Large-scale chemical addictions are an expression of despair about the direction we, as a people, are moving. The spirituality we need in order to heal the addictions epidemic at its roots is not necessarily religion. Increased religiosity, with its beliefs, dogma, and with what sometimes amounts to a sentimental or conceptual orientation to reality, further distorts true human spirituality. True human spirituality helps us to live meaningful lives, and especially, to awaken from the dream which is this life.

I continue to be enriched, nurtured and educated by my involvement with the healing of the indigenous people of North America. I am more than indebted to their hard-won clarity on the role that victimization has played in the hurt they experience, and we all experience, even if we think those are separate issues for us as non-Natives. Ray Daw, a Navajo working among his people in the healing of intergenerational and historic trauma recently voiced words that I think have meaning for us all. He said, "Whether we like it or not, ladies and gentlemen, yes, we have been victimized. We have been. Many of our friends and allies and advocates who are not Native American share that victimization with us. But the important thing is not to stay there. The important thing is to move forward and to become healthy—mentally, emotionally, physically and also spiritually."

The society created by the non-Native perpetrators of the historical trauma of Native people in North America has also been wounded *in the present* by its role as a victimizer in the historic past. The perpetrator also perpetrates on him or herself. I believe it is time to begin to discuss

within the recovery movement some of the details of the mindset, worldview and stance to life of the dominant society because the roots of our addiction epidemic lie there and are still very much alive in the present. We may think that by tending to our own business of recovery the qualities of society at large will automatically change, but I don't think that is true. Confronting and understanding the social and existential values held by the dominant orientation to life are a necessary first step in the *healing beyond mere recovery* from addictions that we all desire.

The meaning and purpose of recovery is to cause us to go deeper into self-knowledge, self-understanding and a compassionate response to everything around us. It is to cause us to learn just who and what we are in a manner not possible when driven by the superficial, externalized orientation that the Western worldview has demanded from all of us. The meaning and purpose of recovery is to integrate Western techno-science as we have come to know it, with a more holistic, indigenous science capable of providing another viewpoint on acquiring and using knowledge. Our obsessive and compulsive use of techno-science, as it is practiced today, feeds the flames of individual and social despair. The meaning and purpose of the addictions epidemic is to guide us first into healing from anger, sorrow, grief and despair, and then to ignite the ongoing natural desire for awakening and self-realization, which has always been the deeper purpose of human life. From such authentic individual goals, the vibrancy and happiness of cultures and communities will arise of itself.

What would be the equivalent of "Wellbriety" for non-Native society in North America? What could provide a doorway to further healing beyond recovery for mainstream recovery approaches of all kinds? What would allow recovery movements to explore the premise that *drugs and alcohol are not the problem* as the Wellbriety movement has begun to do? This is an understanding that large-scale addiction is a symptom of something else. What is that something else? How could recovery efforts in North America look in the direction of wellness and healing without losing their focus on the need for sobriety and recovery first and foremost? Considering these questions could provide a renewed inspiration and direction in recovery advocacy. It could open up the wider issue of *what is a well human being, and how do we get there?*

An individual's recovery must always come first because, "You can't give away what you don't have." It is my opinion that when we are ready, we could add scrutiny of *worldview* into the larger addictions recovery process. After many years of recovery advocacy, this, and support of a contemplative way of life, are really all I have to offer addictions recovery movements any longer. Many people are ready for the transition from recovery, to awakening and contemplation. It is my hope that these wider viewpoints will find their way, in some form or another, into the consciousness of today's recovery movement for the benefit of both human beings and the natural environment worldwide.

*Richard Simonelli
July, 2008*

Epilog

Outrage

Gospel of Thomas # 28

*Jesus said, "I took my stand in the midst of the world, and in flesh I appeared to them.
I found them all drunk, and I did not find any of them thirsty.
My soul ached for the children of humanity,
because they are blind in their hearts and do not see,
for they came into the world empty, and they also seek to depart from the world empty.
But now they are drunk.
When they shake off their wine, then they will repent."*



Jesus, you realized your true estate and found yourself marooned within the culture of your day. Your people were deluded—drunk you called it—fast asleep, just as mine are today. Today we are intoxicated by the so-called scientific and technological marvels of our world. We think we are more evolved than the people of your time. We are all the more deluded because we play with dangerous toys while still blind in our hearts.

Jesus, did you use “drink” figuratively to describe the ignorance of the people of your day? Now the term is both figurative and actual as we struggle with the drug and alcohol use that poisons us.

Jesus, all humans are born without mature knowledge of their true identity. It is our life’s work to discover our true identity. The social systems of your life and times worked to keep your people in ignorance. Our social systems today also work to keep us in a condition of willful unawareness. Even those who follow the religion of your name have not been spared the delusion against which you cry out. Some of us must leave the church to find the true state of our hearts. For some of us, churches block your real name while endlessly speaking your religious name.

Jesus, your heart was broken. Is that why you allowed your physical end to come in the way it did? They say you died for our sins, but that’s not it. Your children still misunderstand. Your soul ache would be unbearable today.

Jesus, we are bloated with materialism and have no real thirst. Jesus, it is getting worse and worse.

But Jesus, some of us are waking up. Some of us have put down wine and have revived. Some of us ache as you did then.

We shake off our wine when we wake up. We won’t wake up ‘till we shake off our wine. Jesus, some of us hear the words you say.

–Richard Simonelli, 2005

The Gospel of Thomas is a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus discovered buried in an urn near the modern city of Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. It has been authenticated as one of the Gnostic gospels expunged from the Christian canon in the fourth century AD.