

## Understanding Relapse

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At a recent workshop we discussed a 'slip' versus relapse and I mentioned how much I dislike the use of the word 'slip'. The connotation, for me, seems to be just some merry little-ole vacation from sobriety, kind of a no real value attached. "*Whoops, I slipped!*"

Almost all agreed that this word is a very poor choice of a word for something so serious and a better word was suggested – lapse. This better describes the serious condition we are talking about and trying to deal with. And RELAPSE indicates a condition of a much longer duration.

The most interesting part of the discussion came from the observation that most of the lapses occurred when the alcoholic woman doubted that she was an alcoholic and then 'tested' to see if it were really true. And, sadly enough for her, she discovered not only was it true, but she had put a blotch on her record of sobriety, to say nothing of a hangover and overwhelming remorse and guilt.

But the real question is – why do we lapse? More seriously, why do we relapse for longer periods of time?

Surely it happens when we are back into our negative feelings about ourselves, which have thrown us back into self-destructive behavior. When we have an emotional upset that we can't handle, we get back into the "What's the use" feeling and, for us, that is devastating unless we have taught ourselves how to combat disappointments and emotional upsets.

But something more happens, and it is when we feel deprived. Over and over again in our discussion, I heard that word used... "I felt deprived."

I suppose to that we can also add, "I felt rejected" or "I was left out" or "I was not included."

These feelings of not being appreciated or not being included seem to follow us into recovery but, obviously, they are feelings that we must begin to deal with at a very early point in our sobriety or we will be right back again, back into the soup... so to speak!

These are very negative feelings that are hard to overcome, since they are feelings we have probably experienced all of our lifetime. Breaking that pattern is tough. No matter how much we tell ourselves that we won't be affected or thrown by rejection or by our feelings of deprivation, we still react to them.

Obviously, the way to not feeling deprived is to put into play a counter action... if that is the only solution that works for us.

Concentrate on how far you have come, that you have achieved much in a short time and that your feeling of being deprived is something to battle in every way you can. Sometimes something as materialistic as buying something for ourselves can help rather than buying a bottle.

When we lapse, we are leaving ourselves to slip back into self-destructive behavior. When this turns into a relapse... a time of more than a one-time lapse... we have lost ourselves to those endless days and nights of alcoholic drinking.

The important thing is to remember that no matter what happens, it can be changed by your stopping drinking. It is also important to remember that the smallest amount we drink is the easiest to 'fix'. If you should lapse, seek out your group at once. The best remedy to feelings of being deprived is to seek out group members the moment those feelings begin, **before** the lapse.

Getting help EARLY is the answer to getting back into the stream of recovery. Too often we feel ashamed and guilty, not wanting to go back to group because we feel disgraced. Not to go back is the worst of the two.

Sobriety is a wonderful time to get to know ourselves, to see what we react to and how our reactions devastated us in the past. To know the negative of ourselves is the first step in changing. My early sobriety was a great time for me in learning so much about myself... what brought out the worst in me and what made me feel depressed and unloved. It also taught me the signals to watch for. You, too, can learn these and never resort to a time of lapse or relapse.

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