The 12 Step Promises

The Promises of AA

As laid out in chapter 6 of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, alcoholics who stay sober and work the Twelve Steps will see these Promises come true:

Promise 1: We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.

Promise 2: We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.

Promise 3: We will comprehend the word serenity.

Promise 4: We will know peace.

Promise 5: No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.

Promise 6: The feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.

Promise 7: We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows.

Promise 8: Self-seeking will slip away.

Promise 9: Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.

Promise 10: Fear of people and economic insecurity will leave us.

Promise 11: We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.

Promise 12: We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

What do the Promises mean?

The Big Book's Promises mostly describe the change in attitude that will transpire within the alcoholic, "sometimes quickly, and sometimes slowly." They may take time, but they "will always materialize if we work for them."

A person working a good program to recover from alcoholism will surely experience an internal shift that produces a new level of peace and well-being. Readers of the Big Book will notice the following words emphasized in these Promises, found in chapter 6, that represent the central benefits and primary purposes of recovery:

- **Freedom**
- **Happiness**
- **Peace**
- **Serenity**
- **Benefit to others**

Simultaneously, the Big Book promises the departure of these unwelcome byproducts of alcoholism:

- **Fear**
- **Regret**
- **Feelings of uselessness**
- **Self-pity**
- **Selfishness and self-seeking**

So the Promises are two-fold: the person who works a good program will gain a spiritual foundation and a whole new outlook on life, and the dread and negativity of alcoholism will be undone.

Why the AA Promises are important

There are four sources of guidance for the recovering alcoholic:

1. **The recovering alcoholic attends AA meetings and is mentored by other members of the fellowship who have practiced the Twelve Steps and applied the AA principles to their own lives.**
2. **The recovering alcoholic is also guided by the program, the Big Book, the Twelve Steps and their instructions.**

3. **The recovering alcoholic establishes a relationship to a Higher Power, whatever its form, and trusts in the guidance of spirit.**
4. **The final source of wisdom comes from within: the recovering alcoholic must create a hopeful vision of the future, and find the determination to make it true.**

The fourth source of guidance, the self, is why the Promises of the Big Book are so important. They precisely describe for the alcoholic the brilliant future that lies ahead for anyone who commits to recovery, and they assure the alcoholic of its outcome.

A final note on the AA Promises

The Big Book promises the newcomer a new manner of living and a happier relationship to life. This is, of course, dependent on working the Twelve Steps, which may at first feel intimidating, foreign or uncomfortable. But the only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking. If someone simply shows up, stays sober and tries their best, they are well on their way to fulfilling those Promises.

*Editor's note: We much prefer the person-first language that emphasizes a person's identity before their disease. However, in keeping with the history of AA, its founding principles and the language that still exists within the fellowship, we have decided to keep the word "alcoholic" to describe people with substance use disorders.

AA welcomes all people with substance use disorders, and is not restricted to alcoholism. Our hope is merely to capture the spirit and language of the program to describe the disease of addiction, and to approach self-identifying "alcoholics" with the language that AA commonly uses.