



CASTLE CRAIG  
HOSPITAL

## Surrender to Win

Chris Burn

THE CASTLE CRAIG PAMPHLET SERIES





## CASTLE CRAIG HOSPITAL

*In choosing to publish our resource material on recovery from all forms of addiction, together with other related therapeutic material, we hope to extend this part of the experience available at Castle Craig Hospital to the community at large.*

*Addiction is a complex illness, and understanding it is a critical part of recovery. The educational elements to our programme - whether they be pamphlets, videos, lectures, workshops, or books - are a fundamental part of everyone's recovery journey. Education or insight alone do not produce recovery but they serve to inform, validate and motivate those struggling to take responsibility for change.*

*These pamphlets are dedicated to all those affected by addiction, be they sufferers themselves, family members, close friends, or those working in the health, psychiatric, therapeutic or social work sectors. We also gratefully acknowledge the help and support given by the Twelve Step fellowships.*

*Our educational materials offer a variety of information on addiction and related areas. These publications do not necessarily represent Castle Craig Hospital or its programmes, nor do they officially speak for any Twelve Step organisation.*

*The personal stories in this material are composites of many individuals and any resemblance to a single person, living or dead, is strictly coincidental.*

*Dr. Margaret Ann McCann*







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*“The principle that we  
shall find no enduring  
strength until we at first  
admit complete defeat is  
the main taproot from  
which our whole society  
has sprung and flowered.”  
(AA Twelve Steps and Twelve  
Traditions)<sup>1</sup>*

## Surrender to Win

In 1931, renowned psychiatrist Carl Jung was working with a patient who was stubbornly resistant to therapy. Rowland H was an alcoholic from Rhode Island, USA whom he saw for many months. Rowland was insightful and cooperative within his limits, but the therapy was not producing good results. A year later Rowland returned to Zürich – he was still drinking, and Jung concluded that further therapy was not going to help. However, the great man had another idea.

He suggested that Rowland should join the Oxford Group, an evangelical Christian movement that stressed the need for total surrender to God. Jung hoped that his patient might undergo a conversion experience, which, as his friend Professor William James of Harvard University had noted, is a fundamental and transformative change, often caused by the introduction of an entirely new source of energy within the unconscious. In other words, a spiritual experience might succeed

in stopping Rowland drinking, where therapy had not.

It worked. Rowland told another apparently hopeless alcoholic, Bill W, about the experience. Bill was impressed by the conversion of his friend, and began thinking how this could help alcoholics everywhere in their struggles to quit. He wrote to Carl Jung himself and received the famous ‘*Spiritus contra Spiritum*’ letter<sup>2</sup> (translated as: *Spirituality against Spirits (i.e. alcohol)*), in response. This was a pivotal moment in Bill W’s search for a solution to the problem of addiction. He began to visualise groups of alcoholics inspiring each other to quit, ‘surrendering to win’. A short time later, the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous was formed, which today has millions of members around the world.

## Meaning of surrender

Surrender is a word that has negative connotations – it means ‘giving up whatever power you have, to another’. When seen in a military setting, it has been coupled with incompetence, dishonour and even cowardice.

## Surrender what?

It should come as a pleasant surprise to those starting a 12 Step programme of recovery that the addict does not have to surrender his freedom, his livelihood or indeed, his life. Paradoxically the act of surrender returns all these things to the addict. All that is required is the surrender of the ego. Surrender this thoroughly and then start winning – a much more attractive option.

## The ego

Unfortunately it is not usually quite that simple. A major problem in treating addicted people is our unwillingness to surrender wholeheartedly or sometimes to admit that we are addicted at all; this stops us from actively seeking help. Our egos simply won't let

us do it; this is the recognised problem of denial. It often happens that the true act of surrender only comes when we have hit ‘rock bottom’ to the extent that our ego is sufficiently deflated enough to admit defeat.

## Growing up

Dr Harry M Tiebout, the first psychiatrist to recognize the success of Alcoholics Anonymous, used many concepts of the AA Programme in his work. He stated that real wholehearted surrender can only take place by a full surrender of the ego—which he defined as *“immature traits carried over from infancy into adulthood, specifically, a feeling of omnipotence, inability to tolerate frustration, and excessive drive, exhibited in the need to do all things precipitously.”*<sup>3</sup>

This immaturity is a recognised part of the addictive personality that is equally unhelpful in causing reluctance on the part of sufferers to take responsibility for their recovery.



## **The Ego and the 12 Steps**

These three defining attributes of the ego – feelings of omnipotence, impatience and excessive drive will be stumbling blocks for anyone trying to recover from addiction via a 12 Step programme. How, for example, could you complete step one, recognising your powerlessness, if your ego is still making you feel ‘omnipotent’?

This is why the AA Big Book, Chapter 5, begins *‘Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path...’*<sup>4</sup> – note the word ‘thoroughly’. Thoroughly surrender your ego and you will make way for humility, acceptance and patience.

### **Tip: merger not surrender**

If you are struggling with the idea of ‘surrender’, try to think of it as more of a ‘merger’ i.e. joining forces with a benevolent and omnipotent power, rather than giving up all control. This view of the surrender process can make it easier for those who struggle with their pride.

## **A turning point**

In the setting of addiction, surrender is all about ego and the giving up of control. But it is also the start of something truly wonderful - a new life.

Many of us have been fighting to keep up appearances, to convince others that everything is ok and that we are in control of our lives. Surrender is a turning point where we give up that fight and face reality. This is difficult but it must be done.

## **A spiritual experience**

In fighting addiction we recognise that we are incapable of managing our own lives and need help, we must surrender to our Higher Power. In other words, surrender is essentially a spiritual experience. For many of us it is the first moment that our lives are touched by spirituality.

## **Rock bottom**

In recovery we describe the turning point as 'reaching rock bottom'. For Professor William James of Harvard University (1902), truly transforming spiritual experiences are nearly always founded on a calamity and collapse i.e. hitting rock bottom. It therefore follows that for many addicts, rock bottom is the moment when we have our conversion experience and surrender.

## **Bill's story**

AA's co-founder, Bill W described his experience so movingly and graphically in his history of Alcoholics Anonymous:

*"My depression deepened unbearably and finally it seemed to me as though I were at the bottom of the pit. I still gagged badly on the notion of a Power Greater than Myself, but finally, just for the moment, the last vestige of my proud obstinacy was crushed. All at once I found myself crying out, 'If there is a God, let Him show Himself! I am ready to do anything, anything!'*

*Suddenly the room lit up with a great white light. I was caught up into an ecstasy which there are no words to describe. It seemed to me, in my mind's eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing. And then it burst upon me that I was a free man. Slowly the ecstasy subsided. I lay on the bed, but now for a time I was in another world, a new world of consciousness. All about me and through me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence, and I thought to myself, 'So this is the God of the preachers!' A great peace stole over me and I thought, 'No matter how wrong things seem to be, they are still all right. Things are all right with God and His world.'"<sup>5</sup>*

## **Making surrender permanent**

As we can see, a major problem is our stubborn unwillingness to surrender or even to admit that we are addicted, and often this only comes when we have hit 'rock bottom' to the extent that we admit defeat. When 'rock bottom' finally arrives, the ego is deflated and we are ready to ask for help. The trick is then to keep this attitude in place – to keep the ego permanently deflated.

## **Fear**

Why do we sometimes refuse to surrender? There is one word that best sums it up – fear. We are naturally are afraid to connect with a Higher Power for two main reasons. Fear of losing control and fear that we will be punished or judged by the powers that be, rather than loved and forgiven. These fears are usually based on past experiences.

## **Let it go**

But once we have surrendered and let go of the past, the feeling of relief and achievement is enormous. As American rock band Linkin Park put it in 2011:

*“Do you feel cold and  
lost in desperation?  
You build up hope, but  
failure’s all you’ve known.  
Remember all the sadness and  
frustration  
And let it go. Let it go.  
And in a burst of light that blinded  
every angel  
As if the sky had blown the heavens  
into stars  
You felt the gravity of tempered  
grace.”<sup>6</sup>*

### **Surrender and compliance**

The reality is that many of us do not surrender thoroughly, it is something too alien to our former way of life, where sheer survival often depended on a refusal to surrender control. This half-hearted approach is known as compliance. We may be willing to change but we many have reservations about the 12 Step process and surrendering. Instead we half-heartedly comply with the steps.

Compliance in one sense can be helpful – the phrase ‘fake it to make it’ means in recovery that if you keep doing the right thing, such as going to meetings, even when you don’t want to, then eventually you will understand the need for doing it and end up wanting it. But it does not work for surrender which must be total and without compromise if it is to work at all. Anything less than that is going to create problems because compliance sets up an inner conflict between outward surrender and inside denial of this. In short, it sets up feelings of guilt, and addicts are not good at living in a state of inner conflict, in fact it is a recipe for disaster.

### **Surrender and acceptance**

Full and wholehearted surrender leads to acceptance, which the founding fathers of AA knew is the key to serenity:

*A.A. Big Book (page 417) –  
Acceptance is the answer to ALL of  
my problems today.<sup>7</sup>*

Carl Jung believed that we are psychosomatic beings who must attend to matters of the spirit as well as the body. If there is conflict between the two, then we will not be truly happy. We will not have true acceptance because we have not fully surrendered.

Perhaps the greatest example of surrender and acceptance is seen in the Third Step Prayer. If we can say this wholeheartedly and obtain in return a feeling of peace then we are successfully following the path marked out by the founding fathers:

*God, I offer myself to Thee—  
To build with me  
and to do with me as Thou wilt.  
Relieve me of the bondage of self,  
that I may better do Thy will.  
Take away my difficulties,  
that victory over them may bear  
witness  
to those I would help of Thy Power,  
Thy Love, and Thy Way of life.  
May I do Thy will always! <sup>8</sup>*

### **Planting the tree of hope**

As we have seen above, people often will only surrender when in despair and things seem utterly hopeless. That is human nature, but paradoxically, surrender can be the turning point where despair turns to hope. There is a story about St Francis of Assisi that, when he was asked what he would do if the world were to end tomorrow, replied: “I would plant a tree.”

In addition, surrender gives us the opportunity to plant that tree.



## References

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## Notes

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