

Huseyin Djemil continues his monthly column on the addiction-recovery world.

Faith in recovery

ADDICTED, TREATED + LIVING RECOVERY

For many people, and certainly for me, faith has played a significant part of their recovery journey. Having "faith in recovery" can mean the addition of a faith to your recovery journey or having faith in a recovery process. For people in a 12-step fellowship, such as Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous (AA or NA), faith might come in the form of a "higher power" – a "power greater than ourselves", which can be faith in the "God of our understanding" and doesn't have to be the God of a particular belief-system. Indeed, some people in recovery see it as nature, or other people in recovery.

I heard staff and ex-residents of a therapeutic community in which I once worked tell residents that they needed to take a leap of "blind faith" as part of the recovery process. In my view, this wasn't blind faith but faith in the fact that many others had gone before them and made it through to recovery. What they were really saying was: believe in the recovery process, it's a tried and trusted, well trodden route and if you could just suspend your disbelief in whatever is holding you back, this programme and the help of your peers, will help you move forward – but it was encapsulated in the term "blind faith".

Smart –Self Management and Recovery Training – describes its approach as "helping individuals recover from any addictive behaviour and lead meaningful and satisfying lives; using a science-based therapeutic programme of training". While this doesn't employ the language of faith directly, it essentially puts its "faith" in a science-based approach.



I won't go into detail at this stage about my personal faith here, as I don't want to be accused of proselytising, but my treatment and recovery journey has included a choice to align myself with the christian faith. This has included joining a local church and having regular fellowship with a group of likeminded believers. Although we are a very diverse group, from many different backgrounds, our common faith is what brings us together – most of the time!

Whatever definition we have of faith and however we apply it to our recovery journey or as part of a recovery process, faith can be a positive component that helps us to envision our life in recovery and helps to provide the motivation and purpose we need to live it on a day to day basis.

We need this vision and motivation when the going gets tough, when things don't go our way, when we are tempted to deal with the 'slings and arrows' life throws at us by adopting our old solutions and behaviours, even though our histories have shown these to exacerbate life.

Addiction or continued problematic use of substances can often be characterised as a relationship; we find refuge in the arms of a solution to a problem or issue by taking a drug or drink. Initially paradise awaits, a genuine escape, the discovery of a secret and wonderful place. We discover later on that our paradise is poisoned but we keep returning to it despite the cost to our real lives and to the lives of those around us.

Huseyin Djemil

"Whether it's faith in a belief system or in a process or in a science-based approach, we need something to 'pull' us away from addiction and keep us on the path of recovery."

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There can be many "pushes" telling us to get out of 'paradise' – we lose our job, our relationships sour and break down, we become homeless, penniless and we sink ever deeper. But we keep returning to the poisoned paradise because a poisoned paradise is better than the reality that

Whether its faith in a belief system or faith in a process or faith in a science-based approach, we need something to 'pull' us away from addiction and keep us on the path of recovery. That something that we call 'faith' can form the basis of what Friedrich Nietzsche calls our "why",



About the author:

"I entered treatment for addiction to heroin and freebase cocaine in 1986. I was 23 years old and had been using daily for 7 years. I spent 2 years in rehab, then re-started my life without drugs. Today, I describe myself as being in long-term recovery from addiction. I have worked in the substance misuse treatment, criminal justice, and social care sector since 1993, have been a freelance consultant since 2007 – and have lived through radical policy change."

we anticipate awaits us in real life, so the 'pushes' to leave are resisted.

'Pushes' – consequences – alone don't seem to work. We need some "pulls" as well as "pushes". We need to find another paradise, one less poisoned and one that is better for us, one greater than we could have imagined in our drink and drug use phases out of touch with healthy reality. We need to fall in love again with something to get us back to real life – and faith can often be the 'pull' that helps people to achieve that. It is akin to hope.

our purpose, our meaning. "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how," Nietzsche explained. "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase," Martin Luther King Jr said. More recently, Steve Jobs of Apple added that "Technology is nothing. What's important is that you have a faith in people... and if you give them tools, they'll do wonderful things with them".

Can I exhort you to explore what faith, in all its forms, means for you and how it might help you on your recovery journey.