

Sobriety is the complete transformation of the mind, body and soul.

## **NO MATTER WHAT!!**

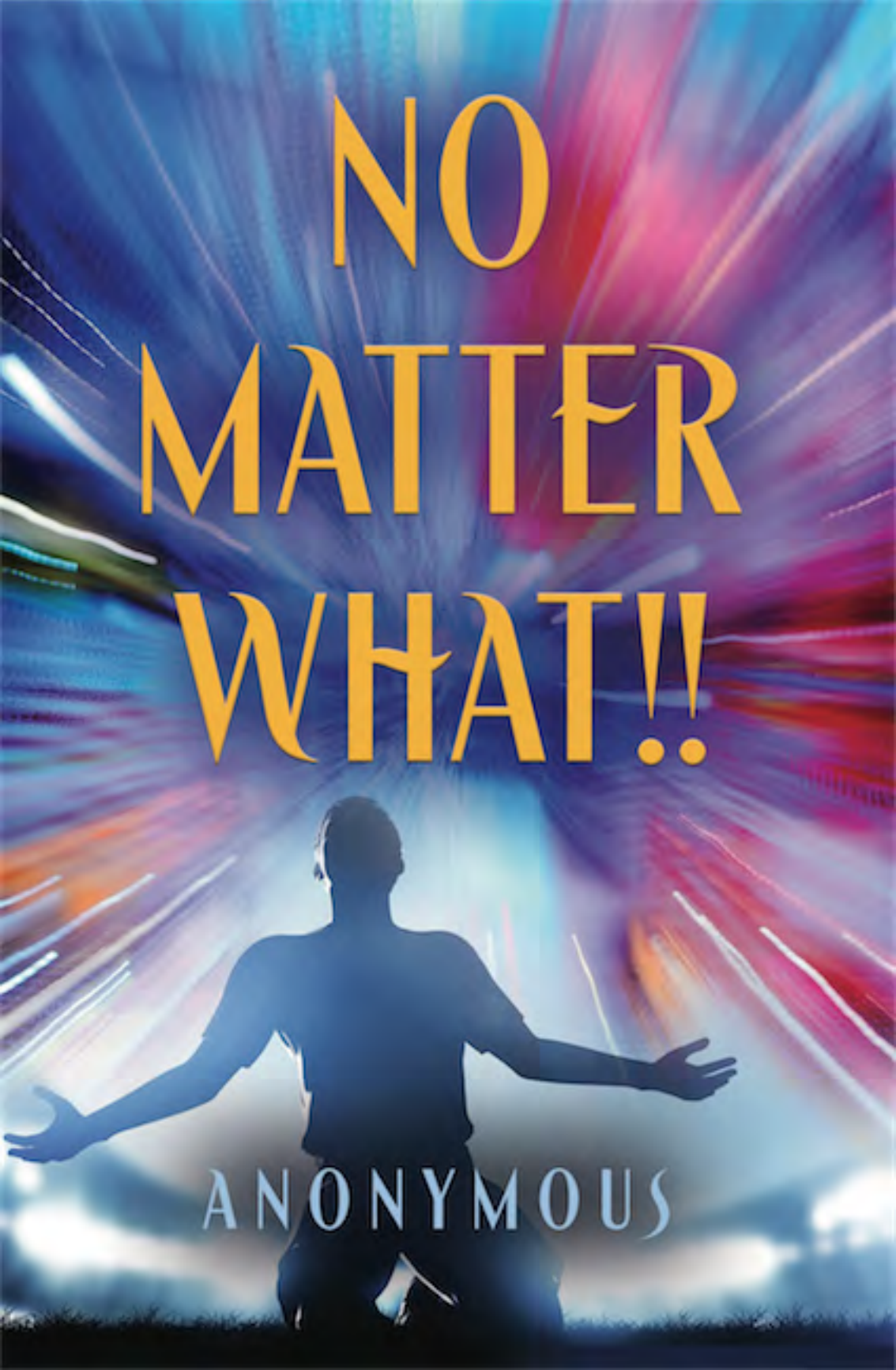
by Anonymous

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The background of the entire image is a vibrant, abstract composition of light streaks in shades of blue, purple, and red, radiating from a central point. In the lower half, a silhouette of a person stands with their back to the viewer and arms outstretched horizontally. The person is positioned against a lighter, hazy blue background that transitions into the colorful streaks above. The overall mood is one of awe, wonder, and openness.

NO  
MATTER  
WHAT!!

ANONYMOUS

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## SOBRIETY

I went to my first AA meeting in 2004. To my great discomfort and chagrin, a friend of mine determined that she must quit drinking or die. She had been sober for 6 months or so and was asked to speak at a Saturday evening AA meeting. She asked me to tag along and I agreed; I was only mildly drunk and in reasonable spirits. She gave a nice recitation of something called her experience, strength and hope. It would have been more colorful and entertaining for me if she had included more of our cavorting and sordid behavior, but that was just me. Everyone else laughed at inappropriate times, but seemed to enjoy it. The chairman of the meeting thanked her and said that he loved AA. Most of his friends and his social life came from AA. I immediately felt sad and disconsolate. I didn't want to go there, but apparently, my smiling, happy friend did.

In 2005, alcohol stopped working for me, I began having trouble with my job for the first time ever, and my life was not very joyful. Even though things were not working for me, I kept drinking. It was the only solution I had in good times and bad. Night sweats, hallucinations, and trembling became a part of my life. My friend told me I had most of the classic signs of alcohol dependency.

Since my job was in jeopardy, I decided to retire as soon as I could develop a plan for the rest of my life. Filled with all my strength and willpower, I decided to quit drinking. That evening I went with a colleague to my favorite bar, fell off my stool, and was unable to regain my footing. I was picked up and escorted from the bar with all my friends watching and told to never return. (I was the first customer the place had in 2000, brought most of my friends there and spent thousands of dollars in the joint.) I needed help.

My friend took me to detox at a hospital in Fairfax, Virginia. After five days, I went to my second AA meeting ready to stop drinking. I met Ron and he became my sponsor, although I had no idea what that meant and I wasn't sure I wanted one. Ron assured me that a sponsor was important for everyone who was walking this path to sobriety. I didn't know it at

the time, but God was taking care of me as I headed in the right direction for the first time in many years. I started calling Ron regularly and following him around to church basements. I also found an AA clubhouse in Falls Church, known as the Unity Club. It was a safe haven and had meetings all day. Although bewildered and confused, I started to enjoy all the meetings. I went to 112 meetings in my first 90 days. Ironic isn't it.

Ron told me that we would work the 12 steps together and I would have to incorporate these principles in my life. If I desired peace in my life, I would have to come to grips with several new ways of thinking. Not much of it would be original thinking, but a synthesis of many aspects of the Greater Truth, which has been around since the beginning of time.

The first new idea was that I had to learn to not drink, **no matter what** was or was not happening in my life. It was not about what I felt, thought or believed. **ACTIONS**—what I do—count. If I take that first drink I will get drunk---not maybe—I will get drunk. If I don't have that first drink, I won't get drunk and my life will get better. **NO MATTER WHAT, I cannot drink alcohol.** It just won't work for me.

The next item was that I had to become willing. Giving up **ALL MY OLD IDEAS** of how things should or should not be was a must. I said to Ron, "all of my old ideas weren't bad." He smiled, "If we find any of them that are good and they are worth keeping, I'll let you know and, don't worry about it, just learn to remain willing to give up all of your old ideas, as we re-examine them in the light of Truth, as you progress in the program, learning to apply the 12 Steps in your life in all your affairs."

Idea three required me to relinquish my judgment about anything and everything that occurs. I would have to learn to rely on the Judgment of My Higher Power to make my decisions for me, in the light of **HIS TRUTH**. I would have to learn to leave the 3rd Step Decision alone. That is, if I wanted peace and serenity in my life. Turning my life and my will over to the care of the God of my understanding was a must. Leave it alone, leave it to God.

A new thought for me was to remember who it was that created me and for what purpose. I must quit trying to create myself. **HE** has created me for **HIS PURPOSE** and most of the time I am not going to know what that is until a long way down the line.

Giving up my insane idea that I am on the face of this earth to be the "Achiever" was the most difficult of all. I had been taught all my life to get ahead, be the number one guy, and to achieve in every way. What a new and unusual new truth was put in my path. I must learn that I have been placed on this earth to be God's Achievement, and I may never fully recognize what that is, apart from knowing that I am here to help my fellows.

"But Ron, I'm the one that needs help." He gave the squint and smile I would so get use to in our conversations. "True enough, but you help others by just showing up. When you come back, it gives everyone hope. It builds my faith when you come back." Strange, but it works.

Getting sober can be the scariest time in your life. We often think it's the end of the world, that our lives are over, and that we'll never have fun again. But these are all just a few common misconceptions about the sober life. This is the number one reason I didn't get sober sooner. I was convinced that sobriety was synonymous with boring. I used to see people at parties who didn't drink and felt bad for them, viewing them as people who had boring lives. I went to an AA meeting slightly drunk and felt sorry for everyone there. Nothing could be worse than living a boring life, and that kept me drinking for a long time. Surprisingly, when I made the decision to stop drinking, I began to feel better physically and see much clearer. I found friends, activities, and an entire life outside of my addiction. It was anything but boring, it was exciting and freeing.

One of the first quotes I heard in early sobriety was, "Sobriety delivers everything alcohol promised." At first it seemed confusing to me, but after a while I began to learn exactly what this meant. Alcohol makes a lot of empty promises. If it didn't, I don't think I would have been so attached to it for so long. For me, alcohol became the solution for all the

hardships I faced. It provided me with support for lack of social skills, relief of my anxiety, and strength to face most situations. I discovered that alcohol's relief could be temporary, and that in some circumstances it even made things worse. Every time I drank I went into the night feeling invincible, smart, and in-charge as soon as the scotch touched my lips.

You have heard about liquid courage and the power alcohol has on socialization. For me, I used it so often that I arrived at the point in my life where I couldn't comfortably socialize without alcohol. I always had a pre-event drink and often a go-cup. And although it can seem like your cares fall away when you drink, sometimes this can go too far. For me, I needed those inhibitions back. I ended up making decisions that I would have never made had I been sober and thinking about my own moral values. With alcohol involved, I was acting like someone I wasn't. I often thought that the women who worked with me all wanted to have sex with me---it could not have been further from the truth

Alcohol became my "security blanket," meaning that at every event or social situation I was in, there was alcohol waiting to make me feel good. I needed alcohol to make events fun, and without it, I was certain nothing would be enjoyable. Alcohol was the constant in my life. I looked to alcohol for security, but it never delivered. When I drank alcohol, there were times when it made me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. It took my mind and body to this safe place where nothing bad could happen to me—or so I thought. But this feeling was just a façade. Alcohol was doing the opposite of keeping me safe. It was putting me in dangerous situations. It gave me a false sense of security that encouraged me to do things I wouldn't normally do.

Everything we do in life, we hope leads us to be happy and joyful. Alcohol is no different. For me, alcohol was the happiness elixir. A few drinks and I was happier than a clam. But alcohol is a depressant. It gave me a spontaneous burst of energy and lowered my inhibitions, but the next day I felt tired, empty, and sad. When I was intoxicated, I felt like I was having the time of my life, but the following days brought me to the lowest of lows.



One of the biggest promises of alcohol is that it provides stress relief. It's not uncommon to hear, "I've had a hard day, I need a drink!" Unfortunately, in our society alcohol is linked to relieving stress. It distracted me for a short amount of time, but it postponed the stress. I still had to deal with everything the next day and beyond.

When drinking, I used to create plans on how to save the world with complete strangers. I really felt deeply connected to these bar friends and these conversations, but the next day I couldn't recall what we talked about. I was mostly talking gibberish or crazy thoughts that would never formulate into action.

The only way I thought I had a lively personality was when I was drinking. Alcohol promised to make me smart, sexy, funny, and witty. I truly believed I had these characteristics when I drank until I took an honest look at myself and listened to what others around me were saying. Sure, I might have said a funny line here or there, but mostly I embarrassed myself and wore a mask that wasn't mine.

Alcohol is most often used as a pain reliever, whether the pain is emotional or physical. We look at alcohol as our cure for any type of pain and we trust that it will cure us always. I got to the point where I realized that alcohol was causing my pain. Every bad thing that happened to me was associated with drinking alcohol. I hurt myself, others, and I also felt the pain of guilt, shame, and remorse. But then I could not stop. What was I to do?

Too bad we can't just snap our fingers, stop drinking and be sober. Life and sobriety would be so much easier. Unfortunately, sobriety is not easy, it's hard. You'll have to feel emotions, get through hard days, and learn a whole new way of being you. At first this can seem like a daunting task, but we have some suggestions for a newcomer to follow that will lead to a sober life and you don't have to complete it all in one day. Sobriety is a process and a lifelong journey that takes hard work and dedication. It's worth every second that you put into it.

It's common to think, "I'm sober and my life is over." We often associate parties and anything fun in life with alcohol and drugs. Therefore, it's not uncommon to believe that life will end once you stop drinking. I was shocked to find out that my life didn't end when I got sober, it truly began for the first time. A man named Lee told me when I was in detox that I would "live a life beyond my wildest dreams." I didn't believe him, but now I know exactly what he meant. I am living a wonderful life. Sobriety has given me a new life that is happy and healthy; something I did not have when drinking. I don't drink, NO MATTER WHAT!

We often come into sobriety feeling bad about ourselves, wondering why we can't drink like others can. I felt weak and inadequate and asked myself, "What's wrong with me?" In recovery, I've learned that sobriety is not a sign of a weakness, it's the bravest thing I have ever done. It takes courage and heart to admit you have a problem and to take steps toward change.

There are several stages in the recovery process. When I made the decision that I couldn't stand the misery any longer, I went to a five-day detox in a hospital setting. If that isn't possible in your circumstances, go to an AA meeting, share where you are and ask for help. You'll find what you need. For the next year, AA meetings will provide you sustenance. Go to at least one per day; two is even better. Find a sponsor—someone who has worked the steps, has some time and has something you want. Take the 12 steps. I believe doing the steps early in your recovery is good so that you get some relief from your resentments and fears. You can always do them again in several years. Sober living begins when you complete the steps and start applying these 12 spiritual axioms in your life. Emotional sobriety takes longer and my search for it keeps me coming back.

There is still a stigma associated with alcoholism, and therefore, sobriety. You may run into reactions from people that include assumptions that you're an alcoholic, which means you are a bad person and that you should be ashamed of your sober status. Shame can keep people drinking and using for years. Most of us carry some sort of shame into sobriety

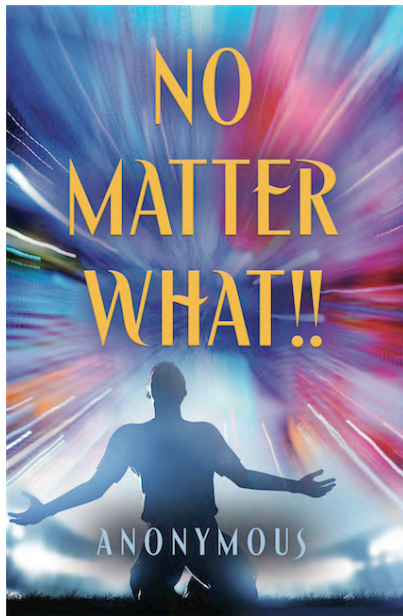
from our drinking days, but there is absolutely no reason to be ashamed of being sober. The steps help us get rid of all shame.

You'll hear a common phrase in recovery that goes, "you are as sick as your secrets." For many of us, our heavy use of alcohol taught us how to lie, take advantage of people and situations, and live a dishonest life. Many times, I came to believe that my lies were true. In recovery, we learn how essential it is to be honest about everything. Secrets can cause you more pain and guilt, and can be detrimental to your sobriety. It is hard to be rigorously honest, but it will serve you best to be so.

Sobriety does not begin and end with abstinence from drugs and alcohol, although doing so is very important. It's much more than that. Becoming sober allows you to get in touch with who you really are, to make amends to those you have hurt in the past, to learn new ways to interact with people, and how to deal with everyday life. It's a complete transformation of the mind, body, and soul.

Sobriety isn't for everyone. It takes commitment, honesty, faith, and working through a lot of pain. It requires facing yourself head on. It requires dedication and time, and not everyone is ready to give what is needed.

If you no longer enjoy the way drugs and alcohol are making you feel, sobriety *is* for you. Sobriety *is not* boring, it can be the first step to the rest of your life.



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