

The Profound Significance of RULE 62

By Alan Henley

Alan Henley is author of "Being a Human Being". He is a pharmacist in Colorado and stays busy with following his passions and light.

There are many reasons to love AA and 12-Step recovery. In its 85+ years of existence the program has saved hundreds of thousands of lives (including the life of this writer); it also transmits practical wisdom from the 'school of hard knocks'- what is shared in the rooms of recovery as well as what is spoken of in the literature and from the mouth of sponsors is real hard-won experience- not theory or intellectual abstraction.

Among the many slogans and sayings that contain so much wisdom, one that has always been most meaningful to me is Rule 62. For those who are not familiar with AA's literature, it is found in the chapter on the Fourth Tradition in the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. It says simply, "Don't take yourself too damn seriously".

Let's examine both the profound wisdom and the realistic perspective of this simple rule.

Alcoholism and addiction are considered by many to be an ego disorder. We have an over-sized, over-active ego that creates separation, isolation, and discomfort that we treat by drinking and drugging. One primary objective of the ego is to promote a bloated sense of our own importance. Few activities directly oppose the agenda of the ego as much as laughing at ourselves.

When we don't take ourselves so "damn seriously" we can approach humility. A close look will show that the principle of humility (personal self sacrifice) underlies all of the Steps and Traditions.

When we can see how truly small and limited we are it becomes easier to lose our self-importance. Consider the following.

Humans are newcomers to this planet. The estimated age of the earth is 4.5 billion years, while humans have existed for 6 million years. Life on this planet went on just fine (probably better) before we humans came along, and it will continue just fine (probably better) after we're gone.

*According to www.bbc.com, "Today we are fairly confident that the **Milky Way** is probably between 100,000 and 150,000 light years across. The observable **Universe** is, of course, much larger. According to current thinking it is about 93 billion light years in diameter." We are smaller than tiny.*

However impressed we may be by our own accomplishments (either as individuals or as a species) it is a humbling fact that we cannot and could not exist without the

cooperation of a host of microorganisms that enable us to survive on this planet. A multitude of beneficial bacteria, virus, and fungi sustain us, and without them mankind would probably not exist.

Our lives are short. Although science may one day unlock the key to immortality, we are like brief sparks from a fire. The average life span of a human being is 79 years. As mentioned, the age of the earth is estimated at 4.5 billion years.

In addition to these facts, there are a number of other reasons why we ought not take ourselves so seriously.

- Self-effacement is an endearing quality of those with humility. Laughing at ourselves makes us more approachable and helps those around us to feel more comfortable with themselves and their own foibles.
- When we take ourselves lightly, we are much more apt to smile. “**Smiling** is good for your health in a number of ways. It can reduce stress, help heart health, lower blood pressure, and boost your immune system by decreasing cortisol in the body. A simple **smile**, genuine or even forced, prompts the brain to produce endorphins and serotonin, causing positive emotions (www.envolvehealth.com)”.
- Not just that, we are more attractive when we are smiling, and more likely to begin the ripple effect of passing along positivity to others. Wearing a smile is one basic way that we can be of service to those around us.

Watch a video of an interview with The Dalai Lama and you will see the poster child for what is being discussed here. His warm smile and laughter radiate humility, and it is fairly obvious that even with his lofty title and position he does not take himself too seriously.

It is possible that Rule 62 may be one of the greatest keys to spiritual growth and sobriety.

An entertaining and beneficial practice is to stand in front of the mirror and spend a just a minute looking at yourself and having a good belly laugh. I challenge anyone to try this for 30 days and not be profoundly changed for the better.

Indeed, enlightenment may be nothing more than simply ‘lightening up’, shedding the heaviness of self-importance, and thereby becoming ‘enlightened’. A wonderfully simple concept. Could it be that easy? I think so.

On a deeper level, let’s look at what this ‘self’ is that we are not going to take too seriously:

Our personal identity, the thing we call ‘ourselves’ is really nothing but a mental construct. Who we think we are is just a collection of memories, conditionings, and

ideas. It is largely defined by our families of origin, our roles, our work, and our relationships. As solid as our identities may appear, our 'self' is really a product of our thought and ideas.

The 'self' is actually a figment of our imagination.

This mental construct that we call 'the self' is in a constant state of change, and what may seem of great importance—what may seem true—today is quite likely to be revised tomorrow or a month or year from now. Our perceptions tend to be altered by our experiences over time.

I tend to think of this thing I call 'myself' as a solid entity, in actuality it is more of a liquid. Like a stream where things (ideas, impressions, feelings) fall into the flow and stay for a while and either sink to the bottom or get washed up on the banks and are gone.

Come on- 2020 was a tough year for most of us. It may be hard to feel good about anything other than the fact that it is almost over. Yet by lightening up with ourselves and becoming less serious (and more playful) we can find relief from the oppressive weight of the daily news.

'Life is too important and precious to be taken seriously". Although this seems paradoxical, I know that I am much better able to experience joy and be open hearted in my brief time on this planet when I take myself less seriously.

All this being said, self-care is important. We may not be much, but we are all we have. We may not be much yet we can make our contribution to the betterment of the world. It is another paradox that an aspect of self-care is keeping our self-importance in proper perspective. Practice humility. Smile.