A lecture by Bob Brissette
The author of this booklet, Bob Brissett, was an active participant in the establishment of Aiseiri Cahir in 1983 and Aiseiri Wexford in 1987.

One of his excellent lectures, also on audio tape, the “King Baby” lecture was first given by Bob at Hazelden in 1971. It subsequently gained immediate acceptance and popularity in Aiseiri. Because of the great impact of this lecture, it is now offered to you in Adobe PDF format.

Sr Eileen Fahey.

Director

Aiseiri

{Aiseiri Contact Information}

Aiseiri, Townspark, Cahir, Co. Tipperary, Ireland
Tel: 052 41166
Fax: 052 42250
Email: aiseiri@eircom.net

Aiseiri, Roxborough, Co. Wexford, Ireland
Tel: 053 41818
Fax: 053 4600
Email: aiseiri@eircom.net

Aiseiri, Ceim Eile, Co. Waterford, Ireland
Tel: 051 853974
Email: aiseiri@eircom.net
**Introduction**

I first heard Bob Brissett give his famous "King Baby" lecture at Hazelden in 1972. I was there receiving treatment for my own drug dependency and Bob, at the same time was acting chief counsellor of a treatment centre called Tiebout Hall. This unit was named after Dr. Harry Tiebout, an American psychiatrist whose four brilliant papers about the personality traits and treatment process have provided both insight and direction which are still relevant today, nearly half a century later.

Bob's King Baby lecture was to transform what to many would seem to be highly sophisticated and very complex information into clear, pithy and colourful language which can be, and indeed has been, clearly understood and appreciated by thousands of ordinary alcoholics beginning their recovery process.

Bob, with his obvious respect and concern for the alcoholic struggling for surrender, became a mentor to me in my own personal recovery as well as during my professional training.

Although he died in 1996 he is still alive in my consciousness and I frequently hear him quoted by other former colleagues, in humour, respect and affection. In contrast to his salty description of the selfish, self-centred alcoholic he claimed to be, Bob was a very warm and caring human being who modeled humility, acceptance and integrity. This was particularly evident during the last five years of his life when he suffered nearly continuous pain, disfigurement and disability with sobriety, patience, courage and apparently total surrender to the circumstances of his life.

He is still a spiritual mentor to me in loving memory. I am glad his work continues to provide insight and clarity through this publication to recovering alcoholics and those who work with them.

**Pat Maguire.**
My name is Bob Brissett. I'm a chemically dependent person. I'm a member of the treatment staff at Hazelden, and this morning we're going to discuss a certain characteristic that is shared by a lot of chemically dependent people. It’s something that often stays with us after we get clean and get dry. It’s something we’re going to have to work on if we’re going to have good sobriety. If, simply, we’re going to be at all happy in this life. It’s something that seems to be born of our loss of personal freedom. This characteristic is immaturity – egocentricity. It’s what we call at Hazelden the ‘King Baby Syndrome’.

That’s it: the ‘King Baby Syndrome’. Now how does the chemically dependent person, the alcoholic, become King Baby, the consummate egomaniac? Professionals tell us that the addict has an almost instinctive need to protect himself from the knowledge that he’s hooked – that this is right in the disease. And that because of it, the addict becomes extremely defensive. It’s this defensiveness, stifling our mental and emotional and spiritual growth, that reduces us all – to some degree at least – to a state of King Babyhood. At any rate, that’s what the psychologists say. And it makes sense to me. But I guess it doesn’t really make any difference how we got where we are: this is where we are, and how do we manage to cope with this problem of ours?

Being King Baby isn’t so bad, really if you happen to be a baby! As a matter of fact, it’s a natural, normal thing in a baby. Babies cry and someone rushes to feed them, change their diapers, hold them, burp them or somehow administer to them. Babies smile and everybody says “Good baby“. Nice things happen to babies. Then they close their eyes and everything goes away. When they open their eyes once more everything comes back again. Babies have absolute power over the world: they can truly make it appear and disappear. The tough old world is really their oyster, and it’s a nice deal for babies. Most people grow out of this stage – maybe ourselves included –
at about the age of four or five. But then, unhappily, some of us, like some of us assembled here this morning, stop growing up at some point and begin growing down! And by the time we get into a treatment programme, we’ve become full-fledged King Babies – genuine egomaniacs.

Oddly enough, another characteristic shared by many chemically dependent people, and it goes right along with the egomania, is a strong feeling of inferiority. Once we get into treatment, most of us do pretty well working on the flip side of the King Baby Syndrome. It’s easier to get over feeling inferior than it is to cope with the egomania, mainly because we don’t enjoy feeling inferior: we don’t get any satisfaction out of it; there aren’t any rewards in being King Baby. For some of us, it’s difficult to even want to quit playing the King Baby game, but there are some very good reasons for doing so. One is that if you do, you feel more free, and you feel more comfortable living and interacting with other human beings, whom you begin to treat as people, not as objects or things to be manipulated and used for your own satisfaction. Another is that you feel cleaner inside, better able to swing with life, to feel the natural high, the intoxication of really being alive and experiencing. People become people, not things to be manipulated and played with like toys. People can become genuine equal partners in this beautiful business of living, not as objects for us to exploit. This morning, we’ll talk about six different ways in which the King Baby Syndrome reveals itself. We’ll discuss each one a little bit and see if we fit in anywhere. We’ll see if any of these descriptions fit us.
Just like babies, alcoholics assume that the world is our little private oyster. We tyrannise our homes, our wives, our children: we demand meals to be served before there has been an opportunity to prepare them. Then we throw tantrums if everything isn’t done thoroughly. We demand that food be of our choice, not the family’s choice. We demand that our T.V programme be tuned in, not the family’s programme. And we deserve this, we tell ourselves, didn’t we work hard all day down at the office? What if we did have five coffee breaks, a three martini lunch that lasted ’til 2.45 and a couple of long, warm counseling sessions with that pretty girl employee who told us how kind and understanding we were. And the King Baby’s wife must accede to his every sexual demand. Didn’t the marriage contract say that she must love, honour and obey? The King Baby, you see, has a tendency to remember his wife’s vows and forget his own! At work, if he happens to be lucky enough to have employees, he terrorises them, demands of them complete obedience. He’s adept at twisting knives, cutting people up and humiliating them and making them frightened, insecure about their jobs. And he does this because it makes him feel better: it makes him feel more powerful. The King then is selfish, he is arrogant, and he’s omnipotent. He demands everything and gives nothing in return. People must be absolutely obedient to his every whim – that’s the King Baby.

Now the King Baby has a female counterpart. We can call her the Princess baby. She’s easy to recognize. She might sweep into the room a half-hour late and everyone must drop everything they’re doing and notice her. Everyone must bow down to her. Her great need is to be the constant centre of attention everywhere she is. Frequently, she speaks and laughs in a loud and (in) what she thinks is an arresting, interesting way – but it isn’t. If the Princess feels like granting you a sexual favour, you are expected to be grateful to her to your death, for having the privilege of going to bed with her. She demands absolute respect from her family and children. She whines and whimpers when all of her demands are not met promptly and with proper gratitude for your having the privilege of serving her. And the
Princess is in deadly competition with her daughters. When they get to be teenagers and she’s starting to sag a little, an ugly, hateful battle develops between her and her children. Like the King, she sees other people as things, not as human beings, not as equals. To her, people are objects to be terrorised, bullied, and manipulated into loving and serving her – into being loyal to her. That’s the Princess.
Next is the Ego Tripper. I guess we’ve all heard of marijuana trips and acid trips and speed trips. The Ego Tripper is on some kind of a trip like that. It’s a person getting high on himself some way or getting high on the praise or adulation that he gets from others. The Ego Tripper always seems to be manoeuvering himself into a position where others are telling him how great he is. The Ego Tripper is good at the polished put-down. Sometimes he makes himself high by putting others down, and you find him all over – in the classroom, in the pulpit, behind a lectern – you might even find him at A.A meetings. Frequently, he identifies with a cause that is basically good – produces what is good – and usually, he’s an effective type of guy or gal and, it’s hard to tell him from the real thing. You can tell who he is because he’s always there, always in a position to get the praise. The Ego Tripper always manages to benefit more than anyone else from the cause or pursuit that he’s identified himself with. A typical Ego Tripper is a Mr. A.A type guy that makes all the meetings, knows all the answers. Everyone tells him how great he is, how many people he’s helped. He speaks up at the meetings. He is always ready with advice. And he makes out with the dollies. And that’s his ego trip. He goes from one group to another, soaking up the praise, making out with the new vulnerable female members. Sometimes he doesn’t even manage to stay sober. History abounds in Ego Trippers and their accomplishments, somehow, always seem to be an interruption of evolution. Anyone who gets puffed up by standing taller by putting others down is an Ego Tripper.
Another type of King Baby alcoholic, one that fakes a lot of us out sometimes is the Falsely Humble Person. This type of alcoholic says, in one way or another, “I’m no damned good; I’ve failed at everything I’ve tried; I’m a noxious worm. Please, everybody, step on me. I deserve to be stepped on. In fact, if you don’t step on me you’re no damned good either”. He tells us how humble he is; if you won’t put him down, he puts himself down and I would guess there’s at least one guy like this in every treatment program unit. He starts out by saying that he’s the worst drunk in the world or the worst addict in the world, and if nobody will buy that, he says that he’s worse than the worst drunk in the world. He might say he’s crazy, a psychopath, or something. He always goes around saying that he doesn’t deserve all this wonderful help he’s getting but just scratch him a little bit and, underneath, you’ll find a self-loving, omnipotent, arrogant human being – an egomaniac too. Kind of a disguised one but a valid one nonetheless.

Another type is the Perfectionist. At first glance, the Perfectionist really looks good. The Perfectionist comes on like a good, solid all American type citizen. If it’s a woman, her house is the cleanest house and most orderly house in town. As a matter of fact, it’s too clean, it’s too well regulated and heaven help whoever has the temerity to dirty it or disrupt it. If it’s a woman, the Perfectionist demands that everyone conforms to her idea of what godliness is. She not only demands perfection in herself, she demands it in others. The Perfectionist sincerely believes either that he or she has achieved Godhood already or, at the least, is perfectly capable of achieving Godhood. When the Perfectionist feels bad it’s because he or she has failed in some way to be perfect, and so the Perfectionist always feels bad and always makes others feel bad because, quite simply, we are not perfect. We are not God and if you have the delusion that you are perfect, that you are God then, of course, you are going to feel bad whenever you find out that you are not – which is going to be most of the time. The male Perfectionist seems to be a good employee, at first glance. He always comes to work on time, he’s honest, usually loyal and he’s rigid. He never makes a mistake. It probably takes him twice as
long to do the job, but he never errs because to do so would be inconsistent with his own idea of his own godliness. It usually turns out that he’s not really a good employee at all. He doesn’t work well with others or for others and it’s almost impossible for anyone to work for him, because, unfortunately, no two good perfectionists have exactly the same idea of what perfection or godliness is. That’s that Perfectionist.
The last variety of King Baby we’ll discuss is what we call the Clinging Vine. People who are Clinging Vines make excessive and overpowering demands upon other people. The Clinging Vine says, “You do it for me; I can’t do it”. This symptom sort of overlaps some of the others. Clinging Vine types flatter you. They might tell you you’ve saved their lives that you’re really great, that they couldn’t exist without you. These types can often be very pleasant people, if you like someone who doesn’t present much of a challenge. If you are married to someone like this, it’s a lot like being married to a little boy or a little girl. They might misbehave but they do pretty much what you want them to do, if it means they will get your approval. Clinging Vine types will dance any tune for your smile. Trouble is, after a while, you notice they are demanding more and more and more of you. And eventually it becomes clear that these demands are insatiable. Unhappily, most of us have done this sort of thing – demanded and demanded and demanded, until our sick dependency has become unbearable to others.
Now, these are the six manifestations of the King Baby Syndrome;

- the King
- the Princess
- the Ego Tripper
- the Falsely Humble
- the Perfectionist
- the Clinging Vine

Those of us who demonstrate one or more of these behaviours share a common delusion, and that delusion is a feeling that the world revolves around us, that we, actually, are the centre of the Universe. This is a serious, sick delusion for anyone – unless of course you do happen to be the centre of the Universe and the world does actually circulate around you – highly unlikely, we suspect. And the frustrations we experience, those of us who are still playing the King Baby game, occur because a dumb old world and all the people that live on it are not obeying our commands.
Now, if we really were the centre of the Universe, if all people and all things did revolve around us, and if we could dominate other people and successfully make all those demands upon them, then we could probably go through life fairly comfortably – if we didn’t happen to have a conscience. But the truth of the matter is, the people are simply not going to bow down and knuckle under to us, and this is the reason why we should try to quit playing the King Baby game. It simply and plainly is not realistic and we are the ones that are bound up in it. Really we are slaves to all those people that we think are slaves to us.

For example, there’s the King Baby who is getting away with it, at the present time. He gets up in the morning, terrorises his wife and children over breakfast, goes to work, tyrannises his employees all day long, saying threatening things just to keep them on their toes, maybe writing a couple of crisp, caustic memos. Then he goes back home. His wife and children bow down to him. Dinner is ready on time, prepared just the way he wants it. The conversation is focused on him. Everything is just the way it is supposed to be in the land of the King. Everyone is doing what the omnipotent King has prescribed that they do. Then maybe something happens. For example, the King might pick his nose and his wife, forgetting her role for the moment, might say, “King, quit picking your nose”. Well the mighty King has fallen, because Kings just don’t pick their noses. His house of cards collapses. The King is frustrated. He discovers abruptly that he cannot control the behaviour of others.
The same sort of thing might happen to the Princess too. Some ignorant person who doesn’t recognize her princeness might comment that she is getting old and beginning to sag, developing some lines in her face, so there really isn’t use pretending. Being King Baby just doesn’t work in the long run. If you’re the Princess, your teenagers are going to be younger than you and they are going to be prettier than you, for the simple reason that they are younger.

And if you’re an Ego Tripper, that kind of behaviour is not going to work either. Somebody’s going to find you out. Somebody is going to cut you down just as you’ve cut others down in a completely humiliating, unendurable way. You simply are not going to be able to fool everybody all the time. The Falsely Humble gets caught too. People see right through him and he gets confronted in the most painful way imaginable. And, of course, the Perfectionist really stands alone. He has isolated himself from God and from man. That’s in the very nature of that symptom. He cannot be perfect. That’s evident. And his life is almost constant frustration. He is more lonely than any creature on the face of the earth. The clinging Vine almost always ends up with nothing or nobody to cling to. No one to lean on. No one that will feed that sick dependency. Okay, so being King Baby doesn’t work. What do we do about it?
A few years ago, when I was spending all the time that I wasn’t drinking helping to publish a daily newspaper up in Northern Minnesota, I heard a speech by a guy named Bill Gold. I don’t remember much about the primary subject of that speech but it was something about the dimensions of time and how a person could get more production if he used time more efficiently. What I do remember was that in his talk, Bill Gold kept making a point over and over again. And I can remember how dumb it sounded to me at the time. He seemed to keep saying that in order to change, we must change. I didn’t have any frame of reference for that kind of remark. Then he’d say stuff like, “It’s not enough to want to change. It’s not enough to need to change. In order to change, we must experience change.” Well, I thought the guy was off his rocker but in the end that remark stuck with me and it helped me a great deal. That crazy gut was saying, “It’s not enough to want to change. It’s not enough to need to change. In order to change, we must experience change.” When I came into treatment, I heard a Hazelden counsellor, Jim Hensen, tell a story about a guy that was hitting himself on the toe with a hammer. This guy was experiencing pain and he kept asking himself questions like, “Why am I hitting myself on the toe with this hammer? And how can I stop hitting myself on the toe with this hammer? And what’s happening to my arm that it keeps hitting at my the toe with a hammer? And the guy was speculating like this and he was hurting like this for a long time. Then he stopped hitting himself on the toe with a hammer? And he stopped hurting, ad he stopped speculating. He changed by experiencing change that’s what those crazy words out of my past came to mean to me finally.
The business of changing or choosing to change is a big deal. We’re talking about a decision of the whole person to go along with something, to do something about something, to risk oneself and everything one has in order to get something better. It has nothing to do with freedom of choice in the usual sense: one cannot choose to change because one ought or sees some good reason to or because someone else wants one to. For choosing to change is very hard. It is terribly personal. To be willing to change is to be willing to risk the unknown and to risk the unknown means giving up a present certainty, for a good which cannot as yet be fully seen. The most vital ingredient of change is courage. Courage to face the unknown. If we have this courage, or, if we’re willing to summon it up, then we can begin to get over playing the King Baby game.

The first change we must make is to accept that God is not me. God is something more than me – something much, much bigger. God is whatever it is that keeps the planets from colliding. God is what runs the Universe, while I don’t run anything, not even my own life. I can find strength to work on my character defects, the strength and courage to change and to do my thing in life, but I don’t run anything. I don’t control anything. So that’s the first part of the cure – to find or recognise a Higher Power. And that’s an experience that might begin anytime, anyplace. Maybe on the day that you play the piano better than you really can. Or the time that a child looks up at with you with complete trust. Or even that day when all the girls seemed prettier than they had before. Some find their Higher Power in nature, others find it in music, art, literature. Some find it in a church. Others find it in people. In groups of people. Wherever you find it, wherever you find an identity with the Universe, a meaning to life that is bigger than you, then you have found the first part of getting over playing the King Baby game. To recognise this power and, somehow, put ourselves in tune with it, puts us on the right path toward getting rid of our King Babyhood. And that’s the first change we must make: giving the job of running the Universe back to the Spirit of the Universe; giving it back to God.
The second change we must make is to alter drastically our perspective on our fellow human beings. We must begin to see people not as objects or things to be managed and manipulated but as equal partners in this beautiful business of living. Our posture truly and deeply must be this: every person on earth is just as important as I am. Now, this second change can be made very nicely, though sometimes pretty painfully, in Alcoholics Anonymous. A lot of people don’t like A.A for the simple reason that they want to continue the King Baby game. You see, the real anonymity of A.A isn’t the cowardly type wherein the shameful member is saying, “don’t tell anyone I belong because I’ll lose my friends and my job and people will look down on me”, as if when he was drunk and incoherent and probably incontinent on the streets, it was okay that they all knew, but now that he’s dry and sober in A.A, he’ll lose everything if people know he belongs.
No, the real anonymity of A.A is in the sense of equality that exists there: no one is better or more important than anyone else and no one is worse or less important than anyone else, regardless of economic circumstances, race, colour, creed, sex or age. And that’s why King Baby doesn’t like A.A. so if you’re having trouble making this change, go to A.A. if you are sincere enough and determined enough to take really tough, confrontative A.A – “tough love A.A” its called – it could help you to start seeing people as equals. It might help you to start loving people and using things.

The third change is to make a commitment to the rest of the Universe, to living in God. This means making a commitment, not to Godlike behaviour, but to living in the manner that we think God would like us to live in. Or to living in a way that is consistent with your own personal experience, or with whatever life force we discover. We might look at it like this: there are 150 people in this room right now; I am one of those 150; you are one of those 150. Now, I am just as important as you; you are just as important as me. But the other 149 people in this room are more important than one person; the whole group is more important than me. But I am just as important as any one person in this group. If you are willing to put yourself, your whole life, into the service of your brothers and sisters who do make up more than you, then you have found a meaning to life that is bigger than you. You’ve found an identity; you’ve found a worthwhile relationship with others. Perhaps that is also the way to true immortality – to a life as you Higher Power would have you live it.
If you do these four things:

**Number One;**
Accept your need for change, face up to it and consciously and deliberately commit the act of change, willing and honestly.

**Number Two;**
Let God or something bigger than yourself run the Universe and you assume your proper role.

**Number Three;**
Interact with other people on an equal level in groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

**Number Four;**
Realise deeply that you are only one of God’s children, that you or any one of you are equal but that humankind is greater than you. And make a commitment to be in the service of your brothers and sisters and to live in whatever way is consistent with your experience of the life force.

If you do these four things, than you are truly overcoming your King Baby symptoms and you are free. Free to be yourself, free to be honest and trusting with other people, free to start really swinging with life. After all this time of misery and unhappiness, to start having some real fun.

Thank you all for listening.