

The Alternative

READING AREA INTERGROUP NEWSLETTER FOR JANUARY, 2003

Editors Note:

The Alternative is published monthly by the Reading Intergroup and presents the experience, strength and hope of A.A. members on recovery from the disease of alcoholism. Ideas expressed here are NOT those of Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole, nor does the publication of any article herein imply any endorsement whatever by the Reading Intergroup.

MY HIGHER POWER...THE LIGHT BULB!

In their sincere and honest attempt to maintain a "hands-off" policy regarding fellow members' religious beliefs and perhaps sensitivities, our founding fathers exercised gentle wisdom and proffered spiritual freedom. No one, it was rightly thought, should be permitted to impose his or her own religious concepts and beliefs upon any other member of the fellowship. The area was much too important to the prospective recoveree to be tampered with by mortal man. The very life of the prospect depends, ultimately, upon his or her "personal relationship" with a "Power greater than themselves." The notion was valid in the Program's earlier days - **and it still is!**

In no way, shape or form, however, was the idea conceived to avoid guiding our beloved newcomer along the path of spiritual progress. Quite the contrary, our whole purpose as recovered alcoholics, was and is to help the next person achieve sobriety. If that person is a real alcoholic his only hope is God. So in its most basic and simplest terms our only real purpose is to help the still-suffering alcoholic to find God. A loving God, a healing God is the alcoholic's only real hope.

This is no easy task. A vast array of difficulties present themselves to thwart the new person on his journey. The foremost adversary, of course, is the illness itself. It seems that many, many alcoholics have a very fierce, emotionally charged resistance to accepting any dependency upon a Power, which, to them, may seem an abstract and remotely distant concept. This

internal resistance is most effectively broken down by the potential recoveree's initial desperation. (It seems such a shame that today's AA actually encourages the newcomer to avoid reaping the blessings of that desperation.) If intense enough and deep enough, this emotional "bottom" will be the very propellant the prospect needs to thrust him into the recovery process offered by AA through its 12 Steps.

Another stumbling block, which many people who are new to the program are currently encountering, is us! We seem to be full of fear as regarding the responsibility we have been given in the area of spiritual guidance. We shirk this responsibility by evasiveness or by the direct sidestepping of the issue by such statements as, "It's God as you understand Him, and it's up to you to come to your own conclusions." So the newcomer is left to his own devices. He is expected to arrive, alone and unguided, at a relationship with his Creator.

One of the most powerful and hope-filled statements to be found in the entire text of *Alcoholics Anonymous* can be found on page 25. "The great fact is just this, and nothing less: That we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way that is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do for ourselves." Are we, today, so far removed from our founder's results of our recovery program that these words are nothing more than a "nice thought" or an exaggeration due to artificially elated emotions? If so, we "obviously cannot transmit something we don't have." We cannot share awareness we don't have. Cannot give guidance we have never gotten. We cannot share a vision of God we have never seen. Our lack, thereby, becomes the newcomer's and he may die because of it!

Our resistance becomes his license. In his liquor befogged mind he does not seek and experience God but begins to "create" one. It's no wonder

his dryness becomes so barren that in a short while he returns to drink. His "Higher Power" was a light bulb! (*No joke. We have heard this comment voiced more than once and not only by a newcomer!*) Or perhaps this power greater than himself was a chair, or a wall, or even a mere mortal sponsor. A quick glance at the top of page 93 of the "Big Book" makes instantly clear a very important qualification in the concept of "...as you understand Him," and that is: "He can choose any conception he likes, PROVIDED IT MAKES SENSE TO HIM."

Power greater than himself - a light bulb? A simple flick of a switch turns off that power. A wall? Not so powerful when confronted with a bulldozer. A chair? An axe can make quick kindling of that higher power. A sponsor then? If he fails to perfect his spiritual life, his old foe alcohol is sure to reclaim him. So he won't do very well as a greater power. How about a whole group? Possibly for someone else, but not for us. If one person is powerless over alcohol, and another, and another, we would have a group of people who are powerless over alcohol. We do not have a group of people who ARE POWERFUL over alcohol. Yet they do not drink! They have gained access to something more powerful than alcohol.

It was never intended that phrases such as "higher power," "power greater than ourselves," or "as we understood Him" were created as an enabling device to justify our membership's continued avoidance of a connection with our Creator. Page 46 of the AA book says, "We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power which is God." Again, "...that Power, which is God." Our founders apparently held no reservations, whatsoever, with Who was dealing with them. Perhaps, we would be well advised to think twice before we attempt any ourselves. Alcoholics Anonymous is not allied with any religion, as we well know. But it is allied with God, "for our very lives as ex-problem drinkers depend on it." It is allied with spirituality, for despite what our preamble states, AA is not a "fellowship," it is a spiritual way of life.

It is our most earnest desire that no one reading this feel that we are trying to impose any presentation of God of His nature on anyone.

Our real hope is that a reader may be jolted from a position of complacency or spiritual evasion and get about the business of recovery.

-The Big Book Bunch

AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS

"I'm an alcoholic...and a drug addict"

"I have to say this for *me*"

"I know this is an AA meeting *but...*"

I used to think I *had* to share about my drug use. After all, AA teaches us to be rigorously honest, doesn't it? As a younger person in AA, I was different than a lot of older, "pure" alcoholics, wasn't I? Nobody is going to tell *me* what to say. Nobody did either...well, a couple of old-timers did take me aside after the meeting to discuss this, but I dismissed them. What did they know? One night I was in the parking lot after a meeting of my homegroup. As the people cleared out, I realized that there were only two of us left - myself, and a new-comer. He was in his sixties and we got to talking. He was actually listening to me! I felt really amazed that a man old enough to be my grandfather would listen to me about anything...especially about AA.

The meeting that night had been on Step One and many there, including myself, recalled their drug use - some in great detail. This man and I talked about the meeting for a bit, then he dropped a bombshell on me. He didn't think he qualified as an alcoholic because he hadn't used any drugs! Here was a man who drank for more years than I was alive - most of them alcoholically - not feeling like he belonged in AA.

I sputtered and stammered for a few minutes while I tried to convince him that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking and that there were no requirements for drug use involved. Thank God he is still sober. Later that night I started to think just a little more about other people than myself. I thought, "So that's why some groups are so concerned about AA's singleness of purpose. Some groups in my area even read a statement declaring our singleness of purpose before their meeting. It's not because they want to nit-pick, or bust anyone's chops, it's simply a matter of helping other alcoholics to know that they belong in AA.

*Reprinted from an article in the September '96
Issue of The Alternative*

ANNOUNCEMENT

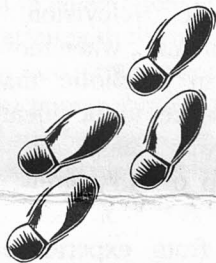
Below is a list of A.A. volunteers who are cleared for the Berks County Prison. If any of them are still interested please contact me so we can set up an orientation. The prison changed their orientation schedule so we have to get together and see what we can do. The following are cleared and ready to go also please contact me and let me know if you are still interested:

*Brad S, James S, Larry S, Al E, Bruce N,
Christine H*

The following people still need orientation:

*Jose B, Angel B, Jewett B, Kevin B, Samuel C,
Jerry F, Rafael F, Craig G, Joe H, Thomas J,
Michael L, Carlos L, Joseph O, Mark P, Peter P,
Larry S, Chad S, Melanie C, Joann C, Linda M,
Evelyn M, Pam R, Karen W, Betsy W*

Please contact me ASAP
Terry McFadden 610-944-1589
Or fax to: 610-944-3168
or e/mail tmaa93@comcast.net



PRINCIPLES OF THE TWELVE STEPS

(The steps are printed on pages 59 & 60 of the Big Book.)

1. Surrender. (Capitulation to hopelessness.)
2. Hope. (Step 2 is the mirror image or opposite of step 1. In step 1 we admit that alcohol is our higher power, and that our lives are unmanageable. In step 2, we find a *different* Higher Power who we hope will bring about a return to sanity in management of our lives.)

3. Commitment. (The key word in step 3 is decision.)

4. Honesty. (An inventory of *self*.)

5. Truth. (Candid *confession* to God and another human being.)

6. Willingness. (Choosing to *abandon* defects of character.)

7. Humility. (Standing naked before God, with nothing to hide, and asking that our flaws—in His eyes—be removed.)

8. Reflection. (Who have we harmed? Are we ready to amend?)

9. Amendment. (Making direct amends/restitution/correction, etc..)

10. Vigilance. (Exercising self-discovery, honesty, abandonment, humility, reflection and amendment on a momentary, daily, and periodic basis.)

11. Attunement. (Becoming as one with our Father.)

12. Service. (Awakening into sober usefulness.)

WHAT BILL W. THOUGHT OF AA BEING A "SELFISH" PROGRAM

An AA correspondent complained directly to Bill W. that he had been "disturbed to hear some A.A. speakers say, 'A.A. is a selfish program.'" The co-founder's response was eventually published in "The A.A. Way of Life":

I can see why you are disturbed.... The word "selfish" ordinarily implies that one is acquisitive, demanding, and thoughtless of the welfare of others. Of course, the A.A. way of life does not at all imply such undesirable traits. What do these speakers mean? Well, any theologian will tell you that the salvation of his own soul is the highest vocation that a man can have. Without salvation - however we may define this - he will have little or nothing. For us in A.A. there is even more urgency.

If we cannot or will not achieve sobriety, then we become truly lost, right in the here and now. We are of no value to anyone, including ourselves, until we find salvation from alcohol. Therefore, our own recovery and spiritual growth have to come first - a right and necessary kind of self-concern.

From "Not-God, A History of Alcoholics Anonymous", pp. 243-244, by Ernest Kurtz.

THE LITTLE DOCTOR WHO LOVED DRUNKS

A drunk is lying on a bed in a hospital, and a doctor is sitting beside the bed. The drunk is talking earnestly to the doctor. "...a wave of depression came over me," the drunk is saying. "I realized that I was powerless - hopeless - that I couldn't help myself, and that nobody else could help me. I was in black despair. And in the midst of this, I remembered about this God business.. .and I rose up in bed and said, "If there be a God, let him show himself now!"

(A doctor specializing in alcoholism hears all kinds of crazy stories from drunks in all stages of de-fogging. You'd expect him to have his tongue in his cheek at this point.)

"All of a sudden, there was a light," the drunk goes on, "a blinding white light that filled the whole room. a tremendous wind seemed to be blowing all around me and right through me. I felt as if I were standing on a high mountain top..."

(You'd think a doctor would become hardened after listening to these drunks rave day after day. It's a discouraging, thankless field... alcoholism.)

The drunk continued: "I felt that I stood in the presence of God. I felt an immense joy. And I was sure beyond all doubt that I was free from my obsession with alcohol. The only condition was that I share the secret of this freedom with other alcoholics and help them to recover."

The drunk paused and turned to the doctor. "Ever since it happened, I've been lying here wondering whether or not I've lost my mind. Tell me, doctor - am I insane - or not?"

The drunk was Bill W.

Fortunately for Bill — fortunately for A.A. — fortunately for the thousands of us who have come after - the doctor was Dr. Silkworth. By great good luck - or by the grace of God (depending upon your viewpoint) - the doctor was Dr. Silkworth.

It would have been so easy to dismiss Bill's experience as hallucination, one of the many possible vagaries of a rum-soaked brain. And a disparaging word from the doctor right at this point could have choked off the tender shoot of faith and killed it. Alcoholics Anonymous might have got started somewhere else, somehow. Or it might not. Certainly it wouldn't have started here. Very possibly the life of every one of us

A.A.'s hung on the doctor's answer to the question, "Am I insane?"

It was there that Dr. Silkworth made the first of his indispensable contributions to A.A. He knew - by an insight that no amount of medical training alone can give a man - that what had happened to Bill was real, and important. "I don't know what you've got," he told Bill, "but whatever it is, hang on to it. You are not insane. And you may have the answer to your problem." The encouragement of the man of science, as much as the spiritual experience itself, started A.A. on its way.

....To Be Continued...

From, The Grapevine, 1951

Announcement

The Prosit Group of Boyertown is
Celebrating an Anniversary!

WHERE: St. Columbkills Church, Basement
200 Indian Springs Road, Boyertown, PA

WHEN: Saturday, January 11th at 1:00pm
(after the speakers meeting)

For more info call
610-473-2237

THE IMPORTANCE OF ANONYMITY

Traditionally, A.A. members have always taken care to preserve their anonymity at the "public" level: press, radio, television, and films. In the early days of A.A., when more stigma was attached to the term "alcoholic" than is the case today, this reluctance to be identified -- and publicized -- was easy to understand. As the Fellowship of A.A. grew, the positive values of anonymity soon became apparent. First, we know from experience that many problem drinkers might hesitate to turn to A.A. for help if they thought their problem might be discussed publicly, even inadvertently, by others. Newcomers should be able to seek help with complete assurance that their identities will not be disclosed to anyone outside the Fellowship.

Then, too, we believe that the concept of personal anonymity has a spiritual significance for us -- that it discourages the drives for personal recognition, power, prestige, or profit that have caused difficulties in some societies.

Much of our relative effectiveness in working with alcoholics might be impaired if we sought or accepted public recognition. While each member of A.A. is free to make his or her own interpretations of A.A. tradition, no individual is ever recognized as a spokesperson for the Fellowship locally, nationally, or internationally. Each member speaks only for himself or herself. A.A. is indebted to all media for their assistance in strengthening the Tradition of anonymity over the years. From time to time, the General Service Office contacts all major media in the United States and Canada, describing the Tradition and asking for cooperation in its observance.

An A.A. member may, for various reasons, "break anonymity" deliberately at the public level. Since this is a matter of individual choice and conscience, the Fellowship as a whole obviously has no control over such deviations from tradition. **It is clear, however, that such individuals do not have the approval of the overwhelming majority of members.**

CAUSES OF RELAPSE

(as offered in AA meetings)

1. Failure to go to AA meetings.
2. Failure to take the 12 steps.
3. Involvement in an emotional relationship.
4. Association with the old crowd.
 5. Failure to get a sponsor.
 6. Failure to read the Big Book.
 7. Failure to get a job.
 7. Desire to achieve oblivion.
 8. Everything else.

CAUSES OF RELAPSE

(according to the Big Book)

1. Failure to grow spiritually
2. Fighting with, or harming others.
3. Failure to work with other alcoholics
 4. Failure to do step five.
 5. Attempt to shield from alcohol.
 6. Failure to make amends.
 7. Selfishness.
 8. Resentment.

Announcement

The new schedules will be ready to print soon and we need *all* the groups to help out. If you would like to have a contact name for your group listed in the schedule, please contact us by phoning Bill S. at 610-370-4415, or send us an email at OurAlternative@hotmail.com.

Let's Hear From You...

If you have something to share we'd be glad to hear from you. We're looking for ideas, inspirations, amusing anecdotes and inspirational experience. Help us carry the message.

Please have all material emailed to OurAlternative@hotmail.com by the 3rd week of January so we can sort it out and print it up for February's issue. You can also call Bill S. at 610-370-4415 to let him know you've got something to say.

Some of the things we'd like to look over are the following topics:

Recovered vs. Recovering

The slogans

AA Unity & Singleness of purpose

We'd *really* like to hear from all you "Old-timers" out there as to how you feel about some of these things. We'd also like to give you an open forum to share your experience, strength and hope with the newcomers and those who may not even have arrived at the doors of AA yet who just happen to get a copy of this into their hands once and again.

By The Way... The 164 Group has extended it's meeting time! We now meet from 7:30pm – 9:00pm. Come join us!

Editors Note:

In closing, I'd like to apologize for all the material I didn't get to add to this issue and reassure everyone who contributed that their material will make the next few issues – God willing. Thanks again to Anmgela M. and the rest of the Alternative Committee for being of invaluable assistance. HAVE A SAFE, SOBER AND JOYOUS NEW YEAR!

*******Reading Intergroup has no outside affiliations. We exist as a central office to serve Alcoholics Anonymous groups in the Reading area*******

ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND INTERGROUP MEETINGS. Meetings are held on the 4th Tuesday of each month, at 7:30pm, at the UGI building on route 10, just up the road from Queen City Diner. We'd like to see *every group* represented, so come out, show your support and GET INVOLVED! Our next meeting is January, 28th 2003. See you there!

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Intergroup Staff

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Spanish Liaison: Angel R. 610-372-2438
Bridging The Gap: Tim M. 610-927-3065

Alternative Editor Email: OurAlternative@hotmail.com

*****Institutional Commitments for January 2003*****

CHILDRENS HOME - *Sundays at 7:30p.m.*

****Suspended Until Further Notice****

WERNERSVILLE - *Tuesdays at 7:00p.m. - Bldg 34*

7 - Leesport
14 - Walnut St. Recovery Group
21 - Spirit of Recovery
28 - The 164 Group
2/4 - Robesonia

WERNERSVILLE - *Thursdays at 11:00a.m.*

9 - OPEN
16 - TeaThyme
23 - OPEN
30 - Stan
2/6 - Alpha

ST. JOE'S HOSP. - *Mondays at 7:00p.m.*

6 - Robesonia
13 - Wilshire
20 - Books & People
27 - Alpha
2/3 - Spirit of Recovery

READING DETOX - *Thursdays at 8:00p.m.*

9 - Wilshire
16 - The 164 Group
23 - Alpha
30 - Boyertown
2/6 - Birdsboro

CHIT-CHAT - *Thursdays at 8:00p.m.*

9 - Spirit of Recovery
16 - Alpha
23 - Robesonia
30 - Walnut St. Recovery Group
2/6 - Boyertown

Please notify anyone at Intergroup if you cannot make your commitment! If you take one for your group, make sure the person agreeing to go has a substitute if they can't make it. If you would like to go to the St. Joe's meeting, contact Melanie at the hospital first to see if there are any AA's there: 610-378-2092. If you are interested in particulars about Chit Chat, contact Brian Halstead, Clinical Director for inpatient care, at 610-678-2332, Ext. 2497. When sending group members to commitments, it's great to double up! Send a newer and an older member, and everyone will benefit!! PLEASE make sure that someone honors the commitment that you take for your group. This could be the only exposure to our Fellowship, that these people have.