



The Sobriety Gazette

A PUBLICATION OF THE MID-MISSISSIPPI INTERGROUP

Let's begin with a moment of silence for the alcoholics/addicts still suffering, followed by the Serenity Prayer... God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

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Alcoholics Anonymous most effective path to alcohol abstinence

Alcoholics Anonymous, the worldwide fellowship of sobriety seekers, is the most effective path to abstinence, according to a comprehensive analysis conducted by a Stanford School of Medicine researcher and his collaborators.

After evaluating 35 studies - involving the work of 145 scientists and the outcomes of 10,080 participants - Keith Humphrys, PHD, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, and his fellow investigators determined that AA was nearly always found to be more effective than psychotherapy in achieving abstinence...

AA works because it's based on social interaction. Humphreys said, noting that members give one another emotional support as well as practical tips to refrain from drinking. "If you want to change your behavior, find some other people who are trying to make the same change," he said.

By Mandy Erickson - Stanford Medicine News Center

Tradition One

Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

Responsibility Statement

I am responsible... When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

The First Step Prayer...

God, Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind, Spirit of Nature or Spirit of the Universe my name is _____. and I'm a real alcoholic... I need your help today. Amen

The Power of Our Stories

When I first came to AA, I had no story.

Oh, there were lots of stories I could tell: drunken episodes, all the problems the world had given me, all my troubles. But no story that was mine, no coherent line through my life. Nothing of a direction, no beginning, middle and ending, happy or otherwise. All I had was a confused mess of vignettes, smothered in anger, loneliness, and self-pity. I didn't come to AA through any rehab or referral. When I got so bad that I couldn't stand it anymore, I just called the number in the phone book – phone book! does that date me, or what – and went to the first meeting they offered. So I went in with almost no expectations, just some vague knowledge from the newspapers that AA was the place to stop drinking.

Someone greeted me, offered a cup of coffee, said some nice things, and guided me to a seat, up near the front. When the meeting started, I was completely lost. Preamble, steps, traditions and whatever else they read: I could parse none of it. A basket appeared in my lap; I think I put a dollar in it.

Then someone went to the front, said he was an alcoholic, and started talking.

My ears woke up before my brain did. Somewhere in the first few minutes of the guy's talk, my ears grabbed my brain, shook it hard, and said "Pay attention! Listen to this." I had no idea what he started with, but suddenly I was paying attention. This stranger was telling me about just what I was feeling like, inside. For the first time in my life, another drunk was getting through to me. I've no idea, now, what he said, at that first meeting, but as I think on it I do remember very vividly how I felt. Something inside me melted, or snapped, of both, and I started crying like a baby. He was funny, too, and I remember laughing through the tears, the whole room laughing, and it just seemed impossible but wonderful.

After he was done, my friendly greeter pushed me up front to get a shiny aluminium coin, and someone said the inevitable "suck on this, and when it melts you can have a drink". Corny, but it made me feel good. He sold me a Big Book on the way out, too – slick salesman.

When I got home, I proudly showed my wife the coin, told her about this amazing guy who told his story about getting out from under the bottle, and said to her, "you know, I think this might work." It did. Twice.

Fast forward a number of years, some of them black with drink; I was not a first time learner in spite of that hopeful start.

I was on business in the Midwest, and dropped in on a meeting in a small farm town, a one-shot visit. They hardly ever got visitors there, so they asked me to share a little of who I was, at introduction time. So I gave a little ten-minute spiel on how I got there that night – initial sobriety, the relapse, how I got back, current struggles, how I was working on my sobriety right then, how good it was ... and looked across the room to see a guy all puddled up and wiping his eyes.

Flashback! Suddenly I was back at my first ever meeting, melting inside. Only now I had a story to share.

I talked to that fellow a bit after the meeting; it was his second meeting. He said, "you were telling my story". He couldn't get over it. Somebody just like him, only sober, employed, successful – showing up out of the blue on a cold night in that tiny town in a fancy car – and he knew I'd been where he was then. We were miles apart by the usual social measures of education, dialect, occupation, dress, you name it, but that little story made us like brothers that night. He said I gave him more hope than he had had in years ... and what he gave me was priceless: the feeling of joy of helping another drunk, that most powerful of all medicines for our disease. The story, you see, was progressing.

Humans have told stories since they learned to talk. For aeons, stories were the history, the law, the hope and the education of all societies. They are so deep in our social consciousness, we respond to them still with our full attention. They have the power to move us emotionally like no other medium. Certain themes have gone on for so long, that, for example, a hero's quest is instantly recognizable: we anticipate the challenge, the obstacles, the pitfalls, the betrayals, the struggles, and the final success. We come to want to be the hero, to act as the hero.

So it is in AA. A drunk can immediately empathise with the story of another drunk's struggles; no other message can get through to him so easily and quickly. And as the AA Success theme becomes familiar, the newer member can relate to the "hero", the more successfully sober story-teller, and he can imagine himself following in those footsteps, and it gives him hope and courage and energy to go on for one more day. The narrative gets in his mind, he wants to act it out, become a hero, become the sober one.

Powerful medicine, indeed. And true medicine, for as we change our behaviour ... emulating a hero, for example ... we now know that we are actually changing our brains, reprogramming the grey matter at the cellular level, down where our addiction lives, deep in our internal reward system.

So when you are new in AA, listen to the stories. Try to live up to the ones that especially strike you. And then when you have some success, tell your story to others. This is one of the many things you can do to help beat your addiction ... and not the smallest. And all those tears? That is catharsis. That is your brain changing, repairing itself.

My story keeps changing, and I keep telling it, knowing that it will resonate with someone, sometime. All our stories do. So as your story develops, start telling it, watch it grow, and keep telling it.

And, of course, listen to others' stories, too. – Chris G.

aaagnostica.org

The Four Absolutes

Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness, and Love

Dr. Bob, a co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), emphasised the crucial role of the Four Absolutes in the formative years of AA. Before the Twelve Steps were established, these absolutes provided vital guidance for members navigating their recovery paths. Dr. Bob highlighted their enduring relevance, observing that decisions aligned with these principles typically resulted in ethical and beneficial outcomes. This foundational influence from the Oxford Group not only shaped AA's initial framework but also deeply affected the development of the Twelve Steps, with Bill Wilson acknowledging the group for inspiring ten of these steps.

The spiritual structure of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous deeply integrates teachings from the Oxford Groups. Bill Wilson, another of AA's founders, attributed this early connection to the spiritual essence evident in most of the steps, encompassing concepts such as conducting a moral inventory, making amends, and surrendering to a higher power, as well as incorporating practices like meditation and prayer.

The Four Absolute originated from Robert E. Speer, a Presbyterian missionary who based them on the moral principles he observed in the life of Jesus, offering them as guidelines for personal behaviour. These principles were later adopted by the Oxford Group, significantly influencing Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Bill Wilson, discussing their integration, highlighted that these Absolutes influenced Steps Six and Seven of the 12-Step program.

Despite their impact, the Four Absolutes were not formally adopted within AA, primarily because the organisation sought to establish its identity separate from the Oxford Group. Additionally, Bill Wilson was concerned that their stringent moral expectations might overwhelm new members not prepared for such challenges.

In the Twelve-Step Recovery context, Dr. Bob and many early members in the Akron and Cleveland areas continued to be guided by the Four Absolutes. Exploring these moral standards offers valuable insights into how they shaped the foundational texts and recovery practices.

Absolute Honesty

Early on, groups like Tom Power's All Addicts Anonymous encapsulated honesty with the imperative to avoid "lying, cheating, or stealing" and to maintain a stance of "no falsehood" in all affairs. This principle of unwavering truthfulness was framed in the Big Book as the need for "rigorous honesty," urging members to continually assess whether their actions were true or false.

Absolute Purity

Defined broadly as purity of mind, body, emotions, and heart, including sexual purity, this standard involves a deep introspection of one's motives, decisions, thoughts, and actions, often summarized by the query, "Is it right, or is it wrong?" The Oxford Group, from which these ideas were derived, advocated for a personal adherence to God's will, rather than imposing strict behavioral codes.

Absolute Unselfishness

This absolute asks members to prioritize what is right and true over personal desires, constantly considering the impact of their actions on others. The focus shifts from self-centered attitudes—like self-importance or self-pity—towards a "God-centered" life aimed at serving others, as highlighted by A.J. Russell, a prominent voice in the Oxford Group.

Absolute Love

Emphasizing the importance of loving God wholly and loving one's neighbor as oneself, this standard probes the beauty of actions and relationships. The Pioneers, reflecting on their own experiences, expressed a deep yearning for more of this profound connection, recognizing that fulfilling the soul's need for love brings meaning and purpose to life, encapsulated in the realization that "God is love."

Although the Big Book authors advised against the opposites of these standards, the continued practice of the Four Absolutes among the Pioneers highlights their enduring impact in shaping the spiritual aspects of the Twelve-Step programs.

Many of us still incorporate the Four Absolutes into our 12-Step programs, inspired by Dr. Bob and other pioneers. These standards act as crucial guideposts that both simplify and deepen our recovery efforts, strengthening our connection with God and each other. While we do not claim to fully achieve these ideals, we aim towards them, using them to drive significant changes in our consciousness, character, and behaviour.

We Are Responsible to Other Alcoholics Who Wish to Be Sober

In an increasing number of meetings today, groups recite the AA Responsibility Statement: 'I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.' But it's one thing to say it; it's another thing to live it.

The young man confirmed that it was, in fact, his first AA meeting, and that he knew nothing about recovery or the Steps. He told the old-timer that his girlfriend insisted he try out AA, and he wasn't thrilled about it.

The old-timer had heard that song before. There's a good chance he'd sung it himself.

The young man asked the old-timer something along the lines of 'How does sobriety work?'

The old-timer could sense the young man's desperation: he needed to hear more than 'It works just fine.' It was apparent that, given the opportunity, the young man was ready to bolt for the door. Being told to stick around and learn the answer for himself wasn't going to cut it.

The old-timer reflected on the gravity of the situation. He knew that one interaction could spell the difference in this young man's decision to give sobriety a chance or return to alcoholism.

So the old-timer took a few moments to describe how it all comes together: 'It works through the combination of two things: the fellowship and the program within the Twelve Steps.'

But the old-timer could again sense the young man's needs. He both needed to talk about his own situation, and less so, to listen to an old man's inside story on all things Twelve Steps. So the old-timer kept it simple and started with the first three Steps.

The old-timer knew to make the language as approachable and solution-oriented as possible, and to make the Steps more actionable, he broke them down something like this:

Step 1: Do you see a connection between your own drinking or using, and the fact that your life has become unmanageable? Look, unmanageable is a five-syllable word for 'out of control.' Can you relate to 'out of control?' Yes? Then proceed.

As for being powerless, it's the same concept. A few syllables that boil down to 'When I drink alcohol or use drugs, things get out of control.' If you can sympathize with that idea of being powerless, then congratulations, you've completed the first Step.

He saw the young man begin to understand, so he carried on to Step 2.

Step 2: The basic idea of Step 2 is that we cannot 'cure' our own addictions. Ham is cured—not addiction. But if you relate to 'out of control,' the good news is that help is available, and you've come to the right place. People in Twelve Step recovery don't have a hammerlock on sobriety. There are other methods of getting sober that work for other people. But what we have works for us, and if you stick with us, you might just find a solution that works for you too. While we admit we cannot 'cure' our addictions, we:

- 'Came: We showed up to meetings.
- 'Came to: We realized that we were living life in an unconscious fashion, not realizing how much damage we were doing to ourselves and others.
- 'Came to believe: We saw that something outside of ourselves can help us, whether that 'something' happens to be a Higher Power (however we define it) or even the 12 Step program itself.'

The old-timer pressed on to Step 3, explaining everything carefully.

Step 3: The first edition of the Big Book has a story in which AA's co-founder Bill Wilson says to a newcomer, 'Your life is certainly jumbled up. Would you consider inviting God to help you unjumble it?' Basically, that's Step 3 in a nutshell. By accepting the spiritual help offered by a Higher Power, we embrace a spiritual program for arresting alcoholism and addiction. By letting a Higher Power 'unjumble'—to use Bill's term—what we've managed to jumble, there's a path ahead.

The old-timer finished with one closing remark: 'That's all we do in 12 Step programs. Through the Steps and through the fellowship, we find deep within ourselves the Power to 'unjumble' our lives.'

This approach still works for the old-timer, and it works for the newcomer, young and old. And that's why everyone is responsible to everyone else, and in this way, sobriety is passed on from one person to the next.

*Editor's note: We much prefer the person-first language that emphasizes a person's identity before their disease. However, in keeping with the history of AA and NA, their founding principles and the language that still exists within the fellowships, we have decided to keep the word alcoholic to describe people with alcohol use disorders.

Our hope is merely to capture the spirit of the fellowships, and to approach people with the language they commonly use to describe the disease of addiction.

Tradition One

Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.

"Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward."

Our whole A.A. program is securely founded on the principle of humility—that is to say, perspective. Which implies, among other things, that we relate ourselves rightly to God and to our fellows; that we each see ourselves as we really are—"a small part of a great whole." Seeing our fellows thus, we shall enjoy group harmony. That is why A.A. Tradition can confidently state, "Our common welfare comes first."

"Does this mean," some will ask, "that in A.A. the individual doesn't count too much? Is he to be swallowed up, dominated by the group?"

No, it doesn't seem to work out that way. Perhaps there is no society on earth more solicitous of personal welfare, more careful to grant the individual the greatest possible liberty of belief and action. Alcoholics Anonymous has no "musts." Few A.A. groups impose penalties on anyone for non-conformity. We do suggest, but we don't discipline. Instead, compliance or non-compliance with any principle of A.A. is a matter for the conscience of the individual; he is the judge of his own conduct. Those words of old time, "Judge not", we observe most literally.

"But", some will argue, "if A.A. has no authority to govern its individual members or groups, how shall it ever be sure that the common welfare comes first? How is it possible to be governed without a government? If everyone can do as he pleases, how can you have naught but anarchy"?

The Answer seems to be that we A.A.s cannot really do as we please, though there is no constituted human authority to restrain us. Actually, our common welfare is protected by powerful safeguards. The moment any action seriously threatens the common welfare, group opinion mobilizes to remind us; our conscience begins to complain. If one persists, he may become so disturbed as to get drunk; alcohol gives him a beating. Group opinion shows him that he is off the beam, his own conscience tells him that he is dead wrong, and, if he goes too far, Barleycorn brings him real conviction. So it is we learn that in matters deeply affecting the group as a whole, "our common welfare comes first." Rebellion ceases and cooperation begins because it must; we have disciplined ourselves. Eventually, of course, we operate because we really wish to; we see that without substantial unity there can be no A.A., and without that, without A.A., there can be little lasting recovery for anyone. We gladly set aside personal ambitions whenever these might harm A.A. we humbly confess that we are but "a small part of a great whole."

Bill W.

The A.A. Grapevine, December, 1947

Tradition One Checklist

1. Am I in my group a healing, mending, integrating person? Am I sometimes divisive? Do I ever gossip or take another member's inventory?
2. Am I a peacemaker? Or do I foster arguments with statements such as "just for the sake of discussion"?
3. Am I gentle with those who rub me the wrong way, or am I sometimes abrasive?
4. Do I make competitive AA remarks, such as comparing one group with another or contrasting AA in one place with AA in another?
5. Do I ever put down some AA activities for not participating in this or that aspect of AA?
6. Am I informed about AA as a whole? Do I support AA as a whole in every way I can, or just the parts that I understand and approve of?
7. Am I as considerate of AA members as I want them to be of me?
8. Do I spout platitudes about love while indulging in and secretly justifying behavior that bristles with hostility?

Announcements

Want to be more included about Announcements and Events from the Mid-Mississippi Intergroup?

Sign up here at: midmissintergroup.org to receive emails related to events and service opportunities!



Intergroup meets the first Thursday of each month.
650 East South Street
Jackson, Mississippi
6:30 pm

Got any ideas for the next Sobriety Gazette?
Contact nntfillingane@gmail.com with topics, graphics, stories, tips, etc.

Yes! I Want to Be a Faithful Fiver

Date _____
Here is my contribution of \$ _____ for _____ Months
Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Home Group _____
Sobriety Date: Month _____ Date _____ Year _____

Faithful Fivers

Faithful Fivers are AA members who pledge at least five dollars each month to support their Central Office. This idea is catching on around the country. The plan came about when we remembered that many of us had spent far more than \$5.00 a month on alcohol during our drinking days.

As a Faithful Fiver, you support the effects of Mis-Mississippi Intergroup: to carry the message of hope to still-suffering alcoholics.

To become a Faithful Fiver simply send monthly contributions to
Central Office
Post Office Box 16228
Jackson, Mississippi 39206

