

## Basket Case

I have yet to be at a meeting that didn't pass the basket. It has come at different moments during the meetings but it has always come. In most meetings the first line of the Seventh Tradition is read as a brief explanation of the purpose of the expectation: "Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting. ..." However, it does not say AA groups should be struggling for financial survival, as is happening currently to one of the largest and most influential groups in my area. When I last joined AA, 21 years ago, everyone was dropping a dollar in the basket. No amount was mentioned or suggested; it just seemed that the most common rate was a buck. In the last decade or so some groups have taken to making a suggestion of \$1 and, more recently \$2.

I recall that when one small group I regularly attended was going to adopt the suggestion of \$2, I'd argued against it. I had some idea that those who couldn't give that much would be embarrassed by such a suggestion. I now have more time, more experience, more security, more sobriety and perhaps a bit more wisdom, and now I feel foolish for the objection.

In the last couple of years, I have reconsidered my position on the basket and the amounts. I have realised that I had been stingy. Here's my newer thinking: If I had been drinking on any given day, I would have surely spent more on alcohol than a dollar or two. Even as the binge drinker that I was, I had a daily average that was several dollars higher than the current Seventh Tradition suggestions. So, I have been thinking, that if I paid more than \$2 to poison myself, soul and body, why am I being so stingy with paying for my sobriety? Hmm.

Well then, how much should I toss into the basket? I tipped the last waiter who served me \$9 to do little more than carry a piece of paper to the chef and a couple of plates to my table. That was more than the \$2 suggestion and far less important to my life. I paid more for frivolous purchases than two dollars. Why have I been so tight with money for the basket? Don't know.

One week I started to give what my last restaurant tip was, but that seemed a bit high. Then I decided to put in the current price of one bar drink. Heck, that's not so much to pay for sobriety.

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I've tossed in a five a ten or a twenty (that's been my maximum) and I had this wonderful sensation. I told myself that perhaps I had covered for those poorer souls who couldn't give a buck. I remind myself that the rent on the clubroom had surely risen over the two decades of my sobriety. I reminded my wife that she would surely have left me had the same amounts been poured down my throat. I felt really pleased – perhaps a bit too pleased – with myself.

I began to wrestle with a couple of small ego issues. Just how good should I feel about this giving? Just how public should I be with it? Should I tell myself that I am so wonderful and generous that I should be honored? Sure disaster, that, for an alcoholic. Should I allow others to see that I am giving more than the suggested amounts? Would that be self-serving? Even this article has risks. Well this past fall I attended a gratitude dinner/fundraiser in my area and the person with the most sober time was the keynote speaker. Among all of the wise and humorous remarks she made, she touched on donations and brought up the same idea of giving what your last drink cost. I felt relieved that I wasn't the only one to arrive at this notion. I would only have added to her remarks that with 40-plus years, her last drink was a lot cheaper than one drunk by someone recently sober.

So, here's what I have concluded. We all might reconsider how long we've been giving the same dollar (or two) and how much the costs to AA groups have risen. Perhaps we all could consider giving at least the current cost of one of the drinks we would have drunk had we not joined Alcoholics Anonymous and taken up sober living. Not only will it benefit the group's survival, thus helping other alcoholics find our path, but it will also provide an inner warmth without the drink. I suggest trying just once to give the cost of a drink and see what that does. By the way, I have decided that I would not fold the higher bills, but allow whom ever might notice to do so. Perhaps it will serve as a model and attract others to donate the same, and I'll keep trying not to feel too good about it.

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