

A.A. is our MAINSTAY



Vol. 10 No. 1
JUNE - 1964

TO NAME BUT A FEW INTERESTING ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

OLD TIMERS. NORA B.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN DISEASE?

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER. COLIN B.

REFLECTIONS OF A FRIEND. - FIRST STEP

COMING EVENTS !!!

ALCOHOLICS **A**NONYMOUS is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol . . . that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority . . . a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants . . . they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose . . . to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An AA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

There still seems a great deal of confusion in A.A. on the question of money and its place in our work. The statement that "there are no fees or dues for membership" seems to be translated by many to mean that A.A. has no need of money. There was a time in the early history of A.A. in the U.S.A. when there were the conservatives who really thought that A.A. should have no money at all; that you could not mix money with a spiritual concept like A.A. And then there were the promoters who thought that A.A. needed huge amounts of money. And who was going to supply it; why - the public of course. Neither of these views was practical and the right answer was eventually found on a practical basis between these two points of view. Surely we offer what we have freely to anyone who needs it and we will never demand that the taker repay or contribute to the cost of what we offer. But it does cost money and a good deal of it too; and we will give the whole membership the opportunity of voluntarily contributing to the cost.

And what are these costs? They start in the group with a little rent and light and power and coffee and tea and milk; perhaps a P.O. Box and some stamps. Perhaps most importantly - a supply of literature and some Big Books. The book "Alcoholics Anonymous" is the basic tool of recovery and generally must be lent to the newcomer. In the Cities we have Inter-Groups with rooms with much higher expenses than the average group; and these services are dependent on the voluntary contributions of the groups supporting them. Now we have four Area Assemblies taking responsibility for the general welfare of A.A. over wide areas; again dependent on the understanding and voluntary support of A.A.'s in their areas. Finally there is A.A. World Service in New York whose free and interested support

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of our first enquirers helped establish A.A. in this distant Beach Head at a time when no one really knew whether A.A. could be established by post. Our thankful support of their effort helps greatly to carry the message to other distant parts of the world.

We find A.A.'s are keen to support these activities when they understand the need. We think the A.A. who puts 1/- in the plate just doesn't know about the wider needs of our fellow sufferers. Our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations if, as a society, we resist the temptation to receive money from the outside world. But this leaves us with a responsibility; one that every member should understand. We cannot skimp when the hat is passed at meetings. Our groups; our areas, and A.A. as a whole cannot function unless our services are sufficient and their bills are paid.

Failure in this matter would be measured in human lives.

Editor.

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"Mainstay" DEADLINE

We are now working to a deadline for the next issue of the 1st of that month, i.e. for July issue - 1st July. This makes it almost impossible to print a reply to an article in one month, the following month. There will generally be a gap of one issue.

We are getting more literary contributions now, God bless you, and we plan to get a form-letter to acknowledge these. Publication will depend on space availability so don't worry if your article is not in the next two issues. They are much appreciated and needed.

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REFLECTIONS OF A FRIEND

1ST STEP - HUMILITY

The first step in the system of A.A. is the most fundamental one and is the practical expression of a virtue which is basic to all good living - humility. As a matter of fact the whole twelve steps are shot through with this virtue, that is why the system infallibly succeeds, if given an honest trial, and it is also the reason why the whole method of A.A. leads one who analyses it to the conclusion that God Himself is behind it.

Humility is that virtue which inclines us to the truth about God and about ourselves. A humble person is essentially an honest person, one who realises and is convinced of his or her own limitations. Many people intellectually admit their limitations as creatures but that admission goes no further than the mental exercise; these people are not really humble because they have not become practically convinced of their intellectual admission. The really humble person, however, admits his condition mentally but also is so convinced of it that in his practical conduct he shows that of himself he is capable of nothing, and whatever of good there is in him, he honestly attributes to the gift of God. This person is easily recognized, he is unassuming, approachable, tolerant, in a word, he is really just his natural self. It is easier, perhaps, to see the picture of the solidly humble person by drawing one of his opposite number - the proud man. This latter individual is self-consciously assured, conceited, boastful, arrogant, intolerant of others, whether of their weaknesses or of their capabilities, of which he is jealous; he is envious, spiteful, ambitious, in short he is a complete bore to those who come in contact with him, which only goes to prove that the humble person is nature's own ideal, for

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instinctively and naturally we are repelled by the proud person.

Some people may arrive at the possession of this virtue by the mental process of reflection, conviction and the logical outcome of conviction - practice; but for the most of us, we arrive there by the practical experience of our weakness, our failures, our miseries, that is by the way of humiliation. Now that is why I think this first step of the A.A. programme of sobriety is God-inspired, because it is the solid foundation not only of the future cure, but is also the basis of integrated, happy living.

"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol... that our lives had become unmanageable", - it is only a person who has become really humble from the experience of weakness will be big enough to make this admission; take this first great step on the road to recovery. If a person has only come to this stage by falling deeply, "into the gutter" as we say, let him not be dismayed or discouraged: humility, the fundamental virtue of A.A. and the assurance of his recovery, is derived from the Latin word "humus" which means the ground. So, if he has only learned humility by hard and self-effacing experience, he is an incomparably richer person for that experience. He has become convinced of his own limitations now, but has also become a fit receptacle of God's grace since, as Holy Writ tells us -

"God gives His grace to the humble."

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Real prayer is not telling God what we want. It is putting ourselves at His disposal so that He can tell us what He wants. Prayer is not trying to get God to change His will. It is trying to find out what His will is, to align ourselves or realign ourselves with His purpose for the world and for us.

(A.A. Comes of Age - page 265)

7.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSN.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN DISEASE ?

To the Editor -

Dear Sir, I have read much on the acceptance of alcoholism as a disease but have always felt that this is a moral or social problem. What are the grounds for considering alcoholism a medical illness? M.D. New York.

ANSWER: A disease is defined as follows:

In general, any deviation from a state of health; an illness or sickness; more specifically, a definite marked process having a characteristic train of symptoms. It may affect the whole body or any of its parts, and its etiology, pathology, and prognosis may be known or unknown. A disease can also be classified according as to whether it is primary or secondary in origin. All patients suffering from the disease of alcoholism are known as problem drinkers. The term "problem drinkers" has more of a moral and social implication and exemplifies that type of reasoning. However, alcoholism does denote a condition in which there is a deviation from a state of health.

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C O M I N G E V E N T S

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|----------------|--|--------------|
| <u>JUNE 20</u> | Waikato/Bay of Plenty Area Assembly | Tauranga |
| <u>JUNE 20</u> | Southern Area Assembly | Christchurch |
| <u>JUNE 27</u> | Central Area Assembly | Napier |
| | <u>NOTE ALTERED DATE</u> | |

AUGUST 8/9 Central Area Assembly -
ANNUAL WEEKEND GATHERING AT -
"ARAHINA" - MARTON

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G O R E

26/4/64.

Dear Mainstay,

This alcohol problem is a bit of a trial at times, in some cases our friendly foe strikes rapidly, but in mine it was a type of slow infiltration, taking about twenty years before I reached a stage where, after the first, I had to have more drinks, with of course, always, for me, a good reason for these. Another ten years passed and it wasn't very pleasant to be living just to drink, with not much peace of mind, even when I had enough liquor available for a period ahead. Period, I think, is right, for if I'd enough for an hour or a week, then there was ever present, the worry for the following hour, day or week.

The mental strain was tough, but somehow I avoided a breakdown, (someone, without any help from me, must have been assisting) but physically I had many complaints, with only one actual sickness - ulcers. A couple of hospital trips, I thought to check on these ulcers, were to me an unnecessary break, but on getting out I did intend to limit my drinks. I was unknowledgeable of the reaction that follows the first drink, so in a couple of weeks was back to my maximum every day capacity.

Next was a bad haemorrhage, a rather close go this time and I was a very quiet patient for a few weeks - however, out and about. Thought a weak whisky and water wouldn't hurt, with the same result as on previous occasions.

There is usually a last time, perhaps the cemetery, but I was lucky and finished up in Dunedin's Mater Hospital, where, thanks to my eyes being opened to the unselfishness of others, and my own selfishness, to the kindness of the nursing sisters, the great help given by Prof. Caughey, and visits by Brian, Ruth and

other Dunedin A.A.'s, for the first time in my life, unlike most of us, I said "I'm finished with booze" -- and that's how easy it was. The depressions were not very pleasant, still aren't. I tried not to look at past years' results, years of total loss. Low periods passed and tomorrow's another day. I was tempted once only since then, and gave a little thought to a drink, but somebody helped my steps that day, though I did not realise this until half an hour later when the inclination had passed.

Four years before taking this first step I had been visited by Howard from Dunedin, followed at varying times by Tom, Allan and then Jim, also Archie and others from Invercargill, but "what were they worrying about me for? I wasn't an alcoholic". I even travelled to Invercargill with Bert for a few Meetings, but the time hadn't just arrived, I was too clever or I could have been four years ahead of myself now. I am deeply grateful to all those people, and admire them all for the manner in which they gifted to me their own valuable time. I suppose my debt really goes back further than this - to the founder of A.A., to our N.Z. groups who all give so unselfishly of their help, and especially to the Invercargill group who opened my eyes. THANK YOU.

Our local group is growing, with, besides Gore members including old timers in Fred and Ian, we have Mac from nearby Wyndham, Fred and Jim from Northern Southland, while over the border in West Otago, Jack, Neil and Bernie are the nucleus of a recently formed group. I can only hope the rate of expansion will continue, there are still so many who need the initial assistance as once I did, and the continued help of meetings and other members as I still do.

My best wishes to MAINSTAY, and in great admiration of your booklet.

GORDON.

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OLD TIMERS

I have been asked to tell of my views on this question of old-timers. I can only write of how I feel about it all.

Two years ago I mentioned at a Meeting my length of sobriety, to make a comparison on the growth of a group over the years. A new member thanked me and asked me to frequently mention time as he had wondered if A.A. worked for long. He also said "Where are the others? Are they all in their graves?"

Someone I love once said "Where are the other nine, were not ten made clean?"

The suggestion that the longer we are sober the less we know, or perhaps remember, of the experience of drying out, the mental confusion, depression and fears, is wrong.

I can in a flash recall my first three days of sobriety, I can recall six months of deafness from noises in my head.

I remember my stomach being tied in a knot with tension, unable to digest food, and because of all these memories I am of use to my sick sister. Time does not stop me from being an alcoholic. Time and much working of the Programme has shown me how to handle my emotions. And here is the rub. Newer people are more emotional about Twelfth Step work, and I know the feeling there. I too would get all pitched up over a contact, at one time.

I know that I can be a "pain in the neck" for not getting in a flap and therefore am often considered to be unable to understand, or too old to be of use to a new person coming to A.A.

Emotionalism can play havoc, and emotionalism can be used. I have found it useful to use emotional words at times to

break down tensions and bring down the tears. We all know a lot about acting, yet the sooner my pidgeon and I get honest with each other the better.

Many times since I have been in A.A. I have wondered about so much activity with other alcoholics and as I always do, I go straight to the God of my understanding and my chat with Him goes something like this - "I'm getting on and would like to settle for some respectable church work like making clothes for orphans, doing the soup for the sick, and becoming a gracious old Mrs. B. in the parish, but help me to know, please show me Your Will for me." The answer comes quickly, the answer is clear. I always find I'm landed with more A.A. activity. Praying only for His Will and trying to do it, I am an alcoholic, I understand other alcoholics, that is God's gift to me, to be used. If I ever get thrown out for being an oldster, I'll start a Fellowship called Alcoholics Anonymous.

NORAH B.

NOTE: By its Tradition 3, A.A. forfeited its right to say who its members can be.

No one can be "thrown out" of A.A.

Editor.

20/5/64 -

"DOMINION"

SCOTS'

ALCOHOLIC

PROBLEM

WGTM.

GLASGOW - Alcoholics in Scotland usually die before the age of 50 and about 15 per cent are dead within three years of becoming alcoholics according to the Scottish Council of the British Medical Association.

The Council stresses the seriousness of the problem of drinking in Scotland where the rate of admission of alcoholics to hospitals is almost seven times higher than in England.

I HAVE NOT FOUND GOD AS I UNDERSTAND
HIM - BUT I'M SOBER

In the April issue of Mainstay the Editorial seemed to be to be an excellent article in all but one respect. As there was also an invitation to write one's own personal experience with the Recovery Programme I have decided to accept and to do so. My only wish in writing this is that it may help some fellow sufferer.

Like the many referred to in the Editorial, I too had trouble with Steps Two and Three. The writer presupposes that this is caused by a failure to be convinced of three things. Namely -

- 1) That we were alcoholics and could not manage our own lives.
- 2) That probably no human power could relieve our alcoholism.
- 3) That God could and would, if sought.

For those who found sobriety this way, I say only "all the very best. You have found something that I have never found."

But to the others, people like myself, this article is really directed. In over half a dozen years in A.A. I have not been able to find "God as I understand Him." So I did the Steps thus -

Step One presented no difficulty, I knew I was an alcoholic and my life was unmanageable.

Step Two - Well, I knew I was insane when drinking, so if A.A. could help me to keep sober I had a chance to return to sanity.

Step Three I just had to leave alone.

Step Four I did and keep doing daily.

As sobriety cleared my thinking I was able to do this more fully as time went on.

Step Five - This Step I did fully and completely with another A.A. member. I could not

direct my confession to a God I did not know, but reasoned if there was a God personal to each of us, He would know it already, or could sit in on it if He wished.

Steps Six and Seven - I had to by-pass. Here again I reasoned that by doing Step Four to the best of my ability I had discovered a lot of defects of character and shortcomings, so did, and am still doing all I can about them.

Steps Eight and Nine, also Ten for that matter presented no great difficulty. Step Ten merely continues Step Four, which I find most important in my recovery, and Eight and Nine I have done with all the honesty at my command.

Step Eleven - bad, like Steps Three and Four, to be by-passed. A lot of time was spent here, as a lot of people, A.A.'s and Clergy, were contacted, but finally I gave up.

Step Twelve. For the first part of this oft misquoted Step I try to live by the Golden Rule. To the more religious I could perhaps put it this way. There are two Great Commandments, namely this. That we love the Lord our God with all our heart etc. and that we love our neighbour as ourselves. Here I miss out the first, and try to do the second. I take all the Twelfth Stepping that comes my way and have quite a few sober pidgeons.

How does this imperfect programme work? I can say only this. I am happier than I have ever been. I have been sober a long time now. My family is a very happy one and I enjoy their full confidence and their respect. As far as I can be the judge I have again taken my place in society and have been voted on to three local committees. My health is good and I enjoy my work. I have peace of mind and no desire to drink. I have developed enough maturity to accept my daily ups and downs. Does this constitute sobriety in its completest sense? I think it does.

SOBER ALCOHOLIC

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THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

My name is Colin, and I am an Alcoholic. These words are typical of the introduction used by alcoholics at A.A. Meetings throughout the world. Too often they are taken for granted and not heeded for what they really are. It may be that we are all too keen to hear the other's story to bother to consider these simple words. I feel they are worthy of, and warrant considerable consideration, and it is the purpose of this article to present them in what I feel to be their true perspective.

I believe that the words of introduction are a solemn declaration of our identification and our association with A.A. They state clearly and concisely, that we are suffering from the disease of Alcoholism. That we are aware of it, and that we accept our plight. The words are not a form of condemnation, nor are they intended to solicit sympathy of others. They are only a means of identification and a statement of our condition.

In A.A. we try to maintain anonymity as part of the original principles suggested when the organisation was founded. It is desirable to maintain this anonymity, but care should be taken that we do not shield ourselves from our responsibilities on account of it. How easy it is to hide behind a screen of anonymity when we are afraid of the consequences of our actions. My own complete acceptance of the A.A. philosophy was delayed because I sheltered behind such a screen. I was both ashamed and afraid of facing my obligations and responsibilities.

We must be prepared to identify ourselves with A.A. if we are to achieve success with our Programme, and I feel we cannot do this while we are content to shield behind anonymity. Sooner or later we are called upon to face up to reality and when we are we must acknowledge that we are in fact, Alcoholics. That we are members of A.A. and that we are trying, per medium of A.A.

God grant me the
Serenity
to accept the things I
cannot change...

Courage to
change the things I can

and Wisdom to
know the difference...

philosophy to achieve our own sobriety. Surely there is no reason to harbour any sense of shame or stigma over this matter. When we have done this, then we will have surely succeeded in taking Step One of the Programme.

Having succeeded in this first Step, we must now endeavour to follow the other eleven Steps suggested. However, throughout we should try to retain our individuality. If we allow ourselves to become swamped in the mass of the Group we will forfeit our self-reliance and self-determination that is so essential to provide the necessary drive to follow the Programme. The A.A. Group is a very essential part of the Programme, but we must try to develop our own individuality if we are to succeed. A sense of personal responsibility is necessary and we cannot have that if we allow ourselves to become swamped in the mass of the Group. Take care however, and do not allow yourself to become either over-bearing or superior-minded.

The conditioning of our minds to the A.A. philosophy is very necessary and we must really become A.A. minded to achieve success. It requires continuous personal application of the A.A. principles to do this. Complete and absolute HONESTY is essential and we must divorce ourselves from bitterness and deception. Step Four tells us we should "Make a Searching and Fearless moral inventory of ourselves". Now my interpretation of this is that we look a little further and not only make a list of our past debits and credits, but try to analyze the motives behind these actions. By doing this we will soon realise just how shallow our lives of the past really were.

This to me is the most salient point of Step Four. Each of us must become aware of and accept the responsibility of our past actions. If indeed we can do this, then we are surely growing up in A.A. May we always remember that Old Age is inevitable, but maturity can only be achieved by growing up physically as well as mentally. Effort makes us grow in A.A. producing SOBRIETY and SERENITY.

COLIN B. EDEN GROUP;