





# **ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**



*the big book of*

# **ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

THE STORY OF HOW MILLIONS OF ALCOHOLICS  
HAVE FOUND RECOVERY FROM ALCOHOLISM

*an alternative edition\**

san francisco, california . 2015

*\*This edition has not been approved by Alcoholics  
Anonymous World Services, Inc.*



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## FORWARD TO THIS EDITION

IN THIS VERSION of the Alcoholics Anonymous text, I have made revisions only insofar as they exclude demographic groups from the commons that is A.A.. The original text was written by white, Christian men in a society that held antiquated beliefs about gender, race, economic status, and professional roles. I have not made any edits to this text for the purpose of improving the writing; I was solely concerned with inclusivity as a primary tenet of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I admire the democracy A.A. exercises when making changes to its literature, however such processes can sometimes impede timely change. I do not believe I know best when it comes to A.A. matters. My attempt here was to change as little of the original message as possible while removing language specific to Judeo-Christian traditions or outdated gender mores.

This book has saved my life. It is truly a sacred document, and I hope I have maintained a level of respect for its origins in this gesture. A.A. has resisted radical alterations because the methods specifically outlined in the language of this book *work*. While I agree that we risk losing members by changing *the Big Book*, I fear we may lose more by retaining a narrative that is inherently exclusive. I hope to be of service to A.A. with this contribution.

*With unending gratitude,  
Kelly Steben*



## THE DOCTOR'S OPINION

WE OF Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the reader will be interested in the medical estimate of the plan of recovery described in this book. Convincing testimony must surely come from medical [professionals](#) who have had experience with the sufferings of our members and have witnessed our return to health. A well known doctor, chief physician at a nationally prominent hospital specializing in alcoholic and drug addiction, gave Alcoholics Anonymous this letter\*:

To Whom It May Concern:

I have specialized in the treatment of alcoholism for many years.

In late 1934 I attended a patient who, though he had been a competent business man of good earning capacity, was an alcoholic of a type I had come to regard as hopeless. In the course of his third treatment he acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. As part of his rehabilitation he commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing upon them that they must do likewise with still others. This has become the basis of a rapidly growing fellowship of these men and their families.

This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered. I personally know thirty of these cases who were of the type with whom other methods had failed completely.

These facts appear to be of extreme medical importance; because of the extraordinary possibilities

*\*This letter has been preserved for historical purposes as it was printed in 1939 but does not reflect current understandings of gender, racial, economic, or professional norms.*

of rapid growth inherent in this group they may mark a new epoch in the annals of alcoholism. These men may well have a remedy for thousands of such situations.

You may rely absolutely on anything they say about themselves.

Very truly yours,  
William D. Silkworth, M.D.

The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture must believe that the **bodies of alcoholics are** quite as abnormal as **their minds**. It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright **mentally unsound**. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete.

The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. Our **non-medical** opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account.

Though we work out our solution on the spiritual as well as an altruistic plane, we favor hospitalization for the alcoholic who is very jittery or befogged. More often than not, it is imperative that **alcoholics' brains** be cleared before **they are** approached, as **they have** then a better chance of understanding and accepting what we have to offer.

**The doctor writes:**

The subject presented in this book seems to me to be of paramount importance to those afflicted with alcoholic addiction.

I say this after many years' experience as Medical Director of one of the oldest hospitals in the country treating alcoholic and drug addiction.

There was, therefore, a sense of real satisfaction when I was asked to contribute a few words on a subject which is covered in such masterly detail in these pages.

We doctors have realized for a long time that some form of moral psychology was of urgent importance to alcoholics, but its application presented difficulties beyond our conception. What with our ultra-modern standards, our scientific approach to everything, we are perhaps not well equipped to apply the powers of good that lie outside our synthetic knowledge.

Many years ago one of the leading contributors to this book came under our care in this hospital and while here he acquired some ideas which he put into practical application at once.

Later, he requested the privilege of being allowed to tell his story to other patients here and with some misgiving, we consented. The cases we have followed through have been most interesting; in fact, many of them are amazing. The unselfishness of these men as we have come to know them, the entire absence of profit motive, and their community spirit, is indeed inspiring to one who has labored long and wearily in this alcoholic field. They believe in themselves, and still more in the Power which pulls chronic alcoholics back from the gates of death. Of course an alcoholic ought to be freed from his physical craving for liquor, and this often requires

a definite hospital procedure, before psychological measures can be of maximum benefit.

We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their selfconfidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve.

Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices. The message which can interest and hold these alcoholic people must have depth and weight. In nearly all cases, their ideals must be grounded in a power greater than themselves, if they are to recreate their lives.

If any feel that as psychiatrists directing a hospital for alcoholics we appear somewhat sentimental, let them stand with us a while on the firing line, see the tragedies, the despairing wives, the little children; let the solving of these problems become a part of their daily work, and even of their sleeping moments, and the most cynical will not wonder that we have accepted and encouraged this movement. We feel, after many years of experience, that we have found nothing which has contributed more to the rehabilitation of these men than the altruistic movement now growing up among them.

Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of

ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks—drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.

On the other hand—and strange as this may seem to those who do not understand—once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol, the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules.

Men have cried out to me in sincere and despairing appeal: "Doctor, I cannot go on like this! I have everything to live for! I must stop, but I cannot! You must help me!"

Faced with this problem, if a doctor is honest with himself, he must sometimes feel his own inadequacy. Although he gives all that is in him, it often is not enough. One feels that something more than

human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change. Though the aggregate of recoveries resulting from psychiatric effort is considerable, we physicians must admit we have made little impression upon the problem as a whole. Many types do not respond to the ordinary psychological approach.

I do not hold with those who believe that alcoholism is entirely a problem of mental control. I have had many men who had, for example, worked a period of months on some problem or business deal which was to be settled on a certain date, favorably to them. They took a drink a day or so prior to the date, and then the phenomenon of craving at once became paramount to all other interests so that the important appointment

was not met. These men were not drinking to escape; they were drinking to overcome a craving beyond their mental control

There are many situations which arise out of the phenomenon of craving which cause men to make the supreme sacrifice rather than continue to fight.

The classification of alcoholics seems most difficult, and in much detail is outside the scope of this book. There are, of course, the psychopaths who are emotionally unstable. We are all familiar with this type. They are always "going on the wagon for keeps." They are over-remorseful and make many resolutions, but never a decision.

There is the type of man who is unwilling to admit that he cannot take a drink. He plans various ways of drinking. He changes his brand or his environment. There is the type who always believes that after being entirely free from alcohol for a period of time he can take a drink without danger. There is the manic-depressive type, who is, perhaps, the least understood by his friends, and about whom a whole chapter could be written.

Then there are types entirely normal in every respect except in the effect alcohol has upon them. They are often able, intelligent, friendly people.

All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving. This phenomenon, as we have suggested, may be the manifestation of an allergy which differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity. It has never been, by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence.

This immediately precipitates us into a seething caldron of debate. Much has been written pro and con, but among physicians, the general opinion seems to be that most chronic alcoholics are doomed.

What is the solution? Perhaps I can best answer this by relating an experience of two years ago.

About one year prior to this experience a man was brought in to be treated for chronic alcoholism. He had but partially recovered from a gastric hemorrhage and seemed to be a case of pathological mental deterioration. He had lost everything worth while in life and was only living, one might say, to drink. He frankly admitted and believed that for him there was no hope. Following the elimination of alcohol there was found to be no permanent brain injury. He accepted the plan outlined in this book. One year later he called to see me, and I experienced a very strange sensation. I knew the man by name, and partly recognized his features, but there all resemblance ended. From a trembling, despairing, nervous wreck, had emerged a man brimming over with self-reliance and contentment. I talked with him for some time, but was not able to bring myself to feel that I had known him before. To me he was a stranger, and so he left me. More than three years have now passed with no return to alcohol.

When I need a mental uplift, I often think of another case brought in by a physician prominent in New York City. The patient had made his own diagnosis, and deciding his situation hopeless, had hidden in a deserted barn determined to die. He was rescued by a searching party, and, in desperate condition, brought to me. Following his physical rehabilitation, he had a talk with me in which he frankly stated he thought the treatment a waste of effort, unless I could assure him, which no one ever had, that in the future he would have the "will power" to resist the impulse to drink.

His alcoholic problem was so complex, and his depression so great, that we felt his only hope would be through what we then called "moral psychology," and we doubted if even that would have any effect.

However, he did become "old" on the ideas contained in this book. He has not had a drink for more than three years. I see him now and then and he is as fine a specimen of manhood as one could wish to meet.

I earnestly advise every alcoholic to read this book through, and though perhaps he came to scoff, he may remain to pray.

William D. Silkworth, M.D.

## chapter 1

### **BILL'S STORY**

WAR FEVER ran high in the New England town to which we new, young officers from Plattsburg were assigned, and we were flattered when the first citizens took us to their homes, making us feel heroic. Here was love, applause, war; moments sublime with intervals hilarious. I was part of life at last, and in the midst of the excitement I discovered liquor. I forgot the strong warnings and the prejudices of my people concerning drink. In time we sailed for "Over There." I was very lonely and again turned to alcohol.

We landed in England. I visited Winchester Cathedral. Much moved, I wandered outside. My attention was caught by a doggerel on an old tombstone:

*Here lies a Hampshire Grenadier  
Who caught his death  
Drinking cold small beer.  
A good soldier is ne'er forgot  
Whether he dieth by musket  
Or by pot.*

Ominous warning—which I failed to heed. Twenty-two, and a veteran of foreign wars, I went home at last. I fancied myself a leader, for had not the [members](#) of my battery given me a special token of appreciation? My talent for leadership, I imagined, would place me at the head of vast enterprises which I would manage with the utmost assurance.

I took a night law course, and obtained employment as investigator for a surety company. The drive for success was on. I'd prove to the world I was important. My work took me about Wall Street and little by little I became interested in the market. Many people lost money—but some became very rich. Why not I? I studied economics and business as well as law. Potential alcoholic that I was, I nearly failed my law course. At one of the finals I was too drunk to think or write. Though my drinking was not yet continuous, it disturbed my wife. We had long talks when I would still her forebodings by telling her that [geniuses](#) conceived their best projects when drunk; that the most majestic constructions of philosophic thought were so derived.

By the time I had completed the course, I knew the law was not for me. The inviting maelstrom of Wall Street had me in its grip. Business and financial leaders were my heroes. Out of this alloy of drink and speculation, I commenced to forge the weapon that one day would turn in its flight like a boomerang and all but cut me to ribbons. Living modestly, my wife and I saved \$1,000. It went into certain securities, then cheap and rather unpopular. I rightly imagined that they would some day have a great rise. I failed to persuade my broker friends to send me out looking over factories and managements, but my wife and I decided to go anyway. I had developed a theory that most people lost money in stocks through ignorance of markets. I discovered many more reasons later on.

We gave up our positions and off we roared on a motorcycle, the sidecar stuffed with tent, blankets, a change of clothes, and three huge volumes of a financial reference service. Our friends thought

a lunacy commission should be appointed. Perhaps they were right. I had had some success at speculation, so we had a little money, but we once worked on a farm for a month to avoid drawing on our small capital. That was the last honest manual labor on my part for many a day. We covered the whole eastern United States in a year. At the end of it, my reports to Wall Street procured me a position there and the use of a large expense account. The exercise of an option brought in more money, leaving us with a profit of several thousand dollars for that year.

For the next few years fortune threw money and applause my way. I had arrived. My judgement and ideas were followed by many to the tune of paper millions. The great boom of the late twenties was seething and swelling. Drink was taking an important and exhilarating part in my life. There was loud talk in the jazz places uptown. Everyone spent in thousands and chattered in millions. Scoffers could scoff and be damned. I made a host of fair-weather friends.

My drinking assumed more serious proportions, continuing all day and almost every night. The remonstrances of my friends terminated in a row and I became a lone wolf. There were many unhappy scenes in our sumptuous apartment. There had been no real infidelity, for loyalty to my wife, helped at times by extreme drunkenness, kept me out of those scrapes.

In 1929 I contracted golf fever. We went at once to the country, [where](#) I started out to overtake Walter Hagen. Liquor caught up with me much faster than I came up behind Walter. I began to be jittery in the morning.

Golf permitted drinking every day and every night. It was fun to carom around the exclusive course which had inspired such awe in me as a lad. I acquired the impeccable coat of tan one sees upon the well-to-do. The local [bankers](#) watched me whirl fat checks in and out of [their tills](#) with amused skepticism.

Abruptly in October 1929 hell broke loose on the New York stock exchange. After one of those days of inferno, I wobbled from a hotel bar to a brokerage office. It was eight o'clock—five hours after the market closed. The ticker still clattered. I was staring at an inch of the tape which bore the inscription XYZ-32. It had been 52 that morning. I was finished and so were many friends. The papers reported [people](#) jumping to death from the towers of High Finance. That disgusted me. I would not jump. I went back to the bar. My friends had dropped several million since ten o'clock—so what? Tomorrow was another day. As I drank, the old fierce determination to win came back.

Next morning I telephoned a friend in Montreal. He had plenty of money left and thought I had better go to Canada. By the following spring we were living in our accustomed style. I felt like Napoleon returning from Elba. No St. Helena for me! But drinking caught up with me again and my generous friend had to let me go. This time we stayed broke.

We went to live with my wife's parents. I found a job; then lost it as the result of a brawl with a taxi driver. Mercifully, no one could guess that I was to have no real employment for five years, or hardly draw a sober breath. My wife began to work in a department store, coming home exhausted to find me drunk. I became an unwelcome hanger-on at brokerage places.

Liquor ceased to be a luxury; it became a necessity. "Bathtub" gin, two bottles a day, and often three, got to be routine. Sometimes a small deal would net a few hundred dollars, and I would pay my bills at the bars and delicatessens. This went on endlessly, and I began to waken very early in the morning shaking violently. A tumbler full of gin followed by half a dozen bottles of beer would be required if I were to eat any breakfast. Nevertheless, I still thought I could control the situation, and there were periods of sobriety which renewed my wife's hope.

Gradually things got worse. The house was taken over by the mortgage holder, my mother-in-law died, my wife and father-in-law became ill.

Then I got a promising business opportunity. Stocks were at the low point of 1932, and I had somehow formed a group to buy. I was to share generously in the profits. Then I went on a prodigious bender, and that chance vanished.

I woke up. This had to be stopped. I saw I could not take so much as one drink. I was through forever. Before then, I had written lots of sweet promises, but my wife happily observed that this time I meant business. And so I did.

Shortly afterward I came home drunk. There had been no fight. Where had been my high resolve? I simply didn't know. It hadn't even come to mind. Someone had pushed a drink my way, and I had taken it. Was I crazy? I began to wonder, for such an appalling lack of perspective seemed near being just that.

Renewing my resolve, I tried again. Some time passed, and confidence began to be replaced by cocksureness. I could laugh at the gin mills. Now I had what it takes! One day I walked into a cafe to telephone. In no time I was beating on the bar asking myself how it happened. As the whisky rose to my head I told myself I would manage better next time, but I might as well get good and drunk then. And I did.

The remorse, horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable. The courage to do battle was not there. My brain raced uncontrollably and there was a terrible sense of impending calamity. I hardly dared cross the street, lest I collapse and be run down by an early morning truck, for it was scarcely daylight. An all night place supplied me with a dozen glasses of ale. My writhing nerves were stilled at last. A morning paper told me the market had gone to hell again. Well, so had I. The market would recover, but I wouldn't. That was a hard thought. Should I kill myself? No—not now. Then a mental fog settled down. Gin would fix that. So two bottles, and— oblivion.

The mind and body are marvelous mechanisms, for mine endured this agony two more years. Sometimes I stole from my wife's slender purse when the morning terror and madness were on me. Again I swayed dizzily before an open window, or the medicine cabinet where there was poison, cursing myself for a weakling. There were flights from city to country and back, as my wife and I sought escape. Then came the night when the physical and mental torture was so hellish I feared I would burst through my window, sash and all. Somehow I managed to drag my mattress to a lower floor, lest I suddenly leap. A doctor came with a heavy sedative. Next day found

me drinking both gin and sedative. This combination soon landed me on the rocks. People feared for my sanity. So did I. I could eat little or nothing when drinking, and I was forty pounds under weight.

My brother-in-law is a physician, and through his kindness and that of my mother I was placed in a nationally-known hospital for the mental and physical rehabilitation of alcoholics. Under the so-called belladonna treatment my brain cleared. Hydrotherapy and mild exercise helped much. Best of all, I met a kind doctor who explained that though certainly selfish and foolish, I had been seriously ill, bodily and mentally.

It relieved me somewhat to learn that in alcoholics the will is amazingly weakened when it comes to combating liquor, though it often remains strong in other respects. My incredible behavior in the face of a desperate desire to stop was explained. Understanding myself now, I fared forth in high hope. For three or four months the goose hung high. I went to town regularly and even made a little money. Surely this was the answer—self-knowledge.

But it was not, for the frightful day came when I drank once more. The curve of my declining moral and bodily health fell off like a ski-jump. After a time I returned to the hospital. This was the finish, the curtain, it seemed to me. My weary and despairing wife was informed that it would all end with heart failure during delirium tremens, or I would develop a wet brain, perhaps within a year. She would soon have to give me over to the undertaker or the asylum.

They did not need to tell me. I knew, and almost welcomed the idea. It was a devastating blow to my pride. I, who had thought so well of myself and my abilities, of my capacity to surmount obstacles, was cornered at last. Now I was to plunge into the dark, joining that endless procession of sots who had gone on before. I thought of my poor wife. There had been much happiness after all. What would I not give to make amends. But that was over now.

No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master.

Trembling, I stepped from the hospital a broken man. Fear sobered me for a bit. Then came the insidious insanity of that first drink, and on Armistice Day 1934, I was off again. Everyone became resigned to the certainty that I would have to be shut up somewhere, or would stumble along to a miserable end. How dark it is before the dawn! In reality that was the beginning of my last debauch. I was soon to be catapulted into what I like to call the fourth dimension of existence. I was to know happiness, peace, and usefulness, in a way of life that is incredibly more wonderful as time passes.

Near the end of that bleak November, I sat drinking in my kitchen. With a certain satisfaction I reflected there was enough gin concealed about the house to carry me through that night and the next day. My wife was at work. I wondered whether I dared hide a full bottle of gin near the head of our bed. I would need it before daylight.

My musing was interrupted by the telephone. The cheery voice of an old school friend asked if he might come over. *He was sober.* It was years since I could remember his coming to New York in that condition. I was amazed. Rumor had it that he had been committed for alcoholic insanity. I wondered how he had escaped. Of course he would have dinner, and then I could drink openly with him. Unmindful of his welfare, I thought only of recapturing the spirit of other days. There was that time we had chartered an airplane to complete a jag! His coming was an oasis in this dreary desert of futility. The very thing—an oasis! Drinkers are like that.

The door opened and he stood there, fresh-skinned and glowing. There was something about his eyes. He was inexplicably different. What had happened?

I pushed a drink across the table. He refused it. Disappointed but curious, I wondered what had got into the fellow. He wasn't himself.

"Come, what's all this about?" I queried.

He looked straight at me. Simply, but smilingly, he said, "I've got religion." I was aghast. So that was it—last summer an alcoholic crackpot; now, I suspected, a little cracked about religion. He had that starry-eyed look. Yes, the old boy was on fire all right. But bless his heart, let him rant! Besides, my gin would last longer than his preaching. But he did no ranting. In a matter of fact way he told how two men had appeared in court, persuading the judge to suspend his commitment. They had told of a simple religious idea and a practical program of action. That was two months ago and the result was self-evident. It worked! He had come to pass his experience along to me—if I cared to have it. I was shocked, but interested. Certainly I was interested. I had to be, for I was hopeless.

He talked for hours. Childhood memories rose before me. I could almost hear the sound of the preacher's voice as I sat, on still Sundays, way over there on the hillside; there was that proffered temperance pledge I never signed; my grandfather's good natured contempt of some church folk and their doings; his insistence that the spheres really had their music; but his denial of the preacher's right to tell him how he must listen; his fearlessness as he spoke of these things just before he died; these recollections welled up from the past. They made me swallow hard.

That war-time day in old Winchester Cathedral came back again. I had always believed in a power greater than myself.

I had often pondered these things. I was not an atheist, for, to me, that means blind faith in the strange proposition that this universe originated in a cipher and aimlessly rushes nowhere. My intellectual heroes, the chemists, the astronomers, even the evolutionists, suggested vast laws and forces at work. Despite contrary indications, I had little doubt that a mighty purpose and rhythm underlay all. How could there be so much of precise and immutable law, and no intelligence? I simply had to believe in a spirit of the universe, who knew neither time nor limitations. But that was as far as I had gone.

With ministers, and the world's religions, I parted right there. When they talked of a higher power personal to me, who was love, super-human strength and direction, I became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such a theory.

To Christ I conceded the certainty of a great man, not too closely followed by those who claimed Him. His moral teaching—most excellent. For myself, I had adopted those parts which seemed convenient and not too difficult; the rest I disregarded.

The wars which had been fought, the burnings and chicanery that religious dispute had facilitated, made me sick. I honestly doubted whether, on balance, the religions of mankind had done any good. Judging from what I had seen in Europe and since, the power of [such a spirit](#) in human affairs was negligible, the [unity of humankind](#) a grim jest. If there was a [dark force](#), it certainly had me.

But my friend sat before me, and he made the pointblank declaration that [his higher power](#) had done for him what he could not do for himself. His human will had failed. Doctors had pronounced him incurable. Society was about to lock him up. Like myself, he had admitted complete defeat. Then he had, in effect, been raised from the dead, suddenly taken from the scrap heap to a level of life better than the best he had ever known!

Had this power originated in him? Obviously it had not. There had been no more power in him than there was in me at that minute; and this was none at all.

That floored me. It began to look as though [spiritual](#) people were right after all. Here was something at work in a human heart which had done the impossible. My ideas about miracles were drastically revised right then. Never mind the musty past; here sat a miracle directly across the kitchen table. He shouted great tidings.

I saw that my friend was much more than inwardly reorganized. He was on a different footing. His roots grasped a new soil.

Despite the living example of my friend there remained in me the vestiges of my old prejudice. The word “God” still aroused a certain antipathy. When the thought was expressed that there might be a **higher power** personal to me this feeling was intensified. I didn’t like the idea. I could go for such conceptions as Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heaven, however loving **its** sway might be. I have since talked with scores of **people** who felt the same way.

My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, “*Why don’t you choose your own conception of a higher power?*”

That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last.

*It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning.* I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of complete willingness I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would!

Thus was I convinced that **my higher power** is concerned with us humans when we want **it** enough. At long last I saw, I felt, I believed. Scales of pride and prejudice fell from my eyes. A new world came into view.

The real significance of my experience in the Cathedral burst upon me. For a brief moment, I had needed and wanted **a higher power**. There had been a humble willingness to have **it** with me—and **it**

came. But soon the sense of *its* presence had been blotted out by worldly clamors, mostly those within myself. And so it had been ever since. How blind I had been.

At the hospital I was separated from alcohol for the last time. Treatment seemed wise, for I showed signs of delirium tremens.

There I humbly offered myself to *my higher power*, as I then understood, to do with me as *it* would. I placed myself unreservedly under *its* care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without *it* I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my *mistakes* and became willing to have my new-found *friend* take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since.

My schoolmate visited me, and I fully acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies. We made a list of people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment. I expressed my entire willingness to approach these individuals, admitting my wrong. Never was I to be critical of them. I was to right all such matters to the utmost of my ability.

I was to test my thinking by the new *higher-power*-consciousness within. Common sense would thus become uncommon sense. I was to sit quietly when in doubt, asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as *it* would have me. Never was I to pray for myself, except as my requests bore on my usefulness to others. Then only might I expect to receive. But that would be in great measure.

My friend promised when these things were done I would enter upon a new relationship with my *higher power*; that I would have the elements of a way of living which answered all my problems. Belief in *a power greater than myself*, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things, were the essential requirements.

Simple, but not easy; a price had to be paid. It meant destruction of self-centeredness. I must turn in all things to [my higher power](#).

These were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I fully accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and serenity as I had never known. There was utter confidence. I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through. [Conception of a higher power](#) comes to most [people](#) gradually, but [its](#) impact on me was sudden and profound.

For a moment I was alarmed, and called my friend, the doctor, to ask if I were still sane. He listened in wonder as I talked.

Finally he shook his head saying, "Something has happened to you I don't understand. But you had better hang on to it. Anything is better than the way you were." The good doctor now sees many [people](#) who have such experiences. He knows that they are real.

While I lay in the hospital the thought came that there were thousands of hopeless alcoholics who might be glad to have what had been so freely given me. Perhaps I could help some of them. They in turn might work with others.

My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs. Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead, he said. And how appallingly true for the alcoholic! For if alcoholics fail to perfect and enlarge [their](#) spiritual [lives](#) through

work and self-sacrifice for others, **they** could not survive the certain trails and low spots ahead. If **they** did not work, **they** would surely drink again, and if **they** drank, **they** would surely die. Then faith would be dead indeed. With us it is just like that.

My wife and I abandoned ourselves with enthusiasm to the idea of helping other alcoholics to a solution of their problems. It was fortunate, for my old business associates remained skeptical for a year and a half, during which I found little work. I was not too well at the time, and was plagued by waves of selfpity and resentment. This sometimes nearly drove me back to drink, but I soon found that when all other measures failed, work with another alcoholic would save the day. Many times I have gone to my old hospital in despair. On talking to a **person** there, I would be amazingly lifted up and set on my feet. It is a design for living that works in rough going.

We commenced to make many fast friends and a fellowship had grown up among us of which it is a wonderful thing to feel a part. The joy of living we really have, even under pressure and difficulty. I have seen hundreds of families set their feet in the path that really goes somewhere; have seen the most impossible domestic situations righted; feuds and bitterness of all sorts wiped out. I have seen **people** come out of asylums and resume a vital place in the lives of their families and communities. Business and professional **folk** have regained their standing. There is scarcely any form of trouble and misery which has not been overcome among us. In one western city and its environs there are one thousand of us and our families. We

meet frequently so that newcomers may find the fellowship they seek. At these informal gatherings one may often see from 50 to 200 persons. We are growing in numbers and power.\*

Alcoholics in their cups are unlovely creatures. Our struggles with them are variously strenuous, comic, and tragic. One poor chap committed suicide in my home. He could not, or would not, see our way of life.

There is, however, a vast amount of fun about it all. I suppose some would be shocked at our seeming worldliness and levity. But just underneath there is deadly earnestness. Faith has to work twenty-four hours a day in and through us, or we perish.

Most of us feel we need look no further for Utopia. We have it with us right here and now. Each day my friend's simple talk in our kitchen multiplies itself in a widening circle of peace on earth and good will to all.

*Bill W., co-founder of A.A., died January 24, 1971*

\*In 2015, A.A. was composed of over 114,000 groups.

## *chapter 2*

### **THERE IS A SOLUTION**

WE, OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, know thousands of **people** who were once just as hopeless as Bill. Nearly all have recovered. They have solved the drink problem.

We are average Americans. All sections of this country and many of its occupations are represented, as well as many political, economic, social, and religious backgrounds. **There** exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful. We are like the passengers of a great liner the moment after rescue from shipwreck when camaraderie, joyousness and democracy pervade the vessel from steerage to Captain's table. Unlike the feelings of the ship's passengers, however, our joy in escape from disaster does not subside as we go our individual ways. The feeling of having shared in a common peril is one element in the powerful cement which binds us. But that in itself would never have held us together as we are now joined.

The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in **compassionate** and harmonious action. This is the great news this book carries to those who suffer from alcoholism.

An illness of this sort—and we have come to believe it an illness—involves those about us in a way no other human sickness can. If a person has cancer all are sorry for **that person** and no one is angry or hurt. But not so with the alcoholic illness, for with it there goes annihilation of all the things worth while in life. It engulfs all whose lives touch the sufferer's. It brings misunderstanding, fierce resentment, financial insecurity, disgusted friends and employers, warped lives of blameless children, sad **partners** and parents—anyone can increase the list.

We hope this volume will inform and comfort those who are, or who may be affected. There are many.

Highly competent psychiatrists who have dealt with us have found it sometimes impossible to persuade an alcoholic to discuss **the** situation without reserve. Strangely enough, **partners**, parents and intimate friends usually find us even more unapproachable than do the psychiatrist and the doctor.

*But the ex-problem drinker who has found this solution, who is properly armed with facts about self, can generally win the entire confidence of another alcoholic in a few hours. Until such an understanding is reached, little or nothing can be accomplished.*

That the **people** who **are** making the approach **have** had the same difficulty, that **they** obviously knows what **they are** talking about, that **their** departments shout at the new prospects that **they are people** with a real answer, that **they have** no attitude of **better-than**, nothing whatever except the sincere desire to be helpful; that there are no

fees to pay, no axes to grind, no people to please, no lectures to be endured—these are the conditions we have found most effective. After such an approach many take up their beds and walk again.

None of us makes a sole vocation of this work, nor do we think its effectiveness would be increased if we did. We feel that elimination of our drinking is but a beginning. A much more important demonstration of our principles lies before us in our respective homes, occupations and affairs. All of us spend much of our spare time in the sort of effort which we are going to describe. A few are fortunate enough to be so situated that they can give nearly all their time to the work.

If we keep on the way we are going there is little doubt that much good will result, but the surface of the problem would hardly be scratched. Those of us who live in large cities are overcome by the reflection that close by hundreds are dropping into oblivion every day. Many could recover if they had the opportunity we have enjoyed. How then shall we present that which had been so freely given us?

We have concluded to publish an anonymous volume setting forth the problem as we see it. We shall bring to the task our combined experience and knowledge. This should suggest a useful program for anyone concerned with a drinking problem.

Of necessity there will have to be discussion of matters medical, psychiatric, social, and religious. We are aware that these matters are, from their very nature, controversial. Nothing would please us so much as to write a book which would contain no basis for contention or argument. We shall do our utmost to achieve that ideal. Most of

us sense that real tolerance of other people's shortcomings and viewpoints and a respect for their opinions are attitudes which make us more useful to others. Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers, depend upon our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs.

You may already have asked yourself why it is that all of us become so very ill from drinking. Doubtless you are curious to discover how and why, in the face of expert opinion to the contrary, we have recovered from a hopeless condition of mind and body. If you are an alcoholic who wants to get over it, you may already be asking—"What do I have to do?"

It is the purpose of this book to answer such questions specifically. We shall tell you what we have done. Before going into a detailed discussion, it may be well to summarize some points as we see them.

How many times people have said to us: "I can take it or leave it alone. Why can't **they**?" "Why don't you drink **moderately** or quit?" "That **person** can't handle liquor." "Why don't you try beer and wine?" "Lay off the hard stuff." "**Their** will power must be weak." "**They** could stop if **they** wanted to." "**They've got such a loving partners**, I should think **they'd** stop for **their partners'** sake." "The doctor told **them** that if **they** ever drank again it would kill **them**, but there **they are** all lit up again."

Now these are commonplace observations on drinkers which we hear all the time. Back of them is a world of ignorance and misunderstanding. We see that these expressions refer to people whose reactions are very different from ours.

Moderate drinkers have little trouble in giving up liquor entirely if they have good reason for it. They can take it or leave it alone.

Then we have a certain type of hard drinker. **They** may have the habit badly enough to gradually impair **them** physically and mentally. It may cause **them** to die a few years before **their** time. If a sufficiently strong reason—ill health, falling in love, change of environment, or the warning of a doctor—becomes operative, **these people** can also stop or moderate, although **they** may find it difficult and troublesome and may even need medical attention.

But what about the real alcoholics? **They** may start off as moderate drinkers; **they** may or may not become continuous hard drinkers; but at some stage of **their** drinking careers **they** begin to lose all control of **their** liquor consumption, once **they** starts to drink.

Here **are the folks** who **have** been puzzling you, especially in **their** lack of control. **They do** absurd, incredible, tragic things while drinking. **They are** real Dr. Jekylls and Mr. Hydes. **They are** seldom mildly intoxicated. **They are** always more or less insanely drunk. **Their** dispositions while drinking resemble **their** normal natures but little. **They** may be the finest **folks** in the world. Yet let **them** drink for a day, and **they** frequently become disgustingly, and even dangerously anti-social. **They have** a positive genius for getting tight at exactly the wrong moment, particularly when some important decision must be made or engagement kept. **They are** often perfectly sensible and well balanced concerning everything except liquor, but in that respect **they are** incredibly dishonest and selfish. **They** often possess special abilities, skills, and aptitudes, and **have** promising careers ahead of **them**. **They** use **their** gifts to build up bright outlooks for **their** families and **themselves**, and then pull the structures down on **their** heads by senseless series of sprees. **They are the people** who go to bed so intoxicated **they** ought to sleep the clock around. Yet early next morning **they** search madly for the bottles **they** misplaced the

night before. If **they** can afford it, **they** may have liquor concealed all over **their** houses to be certain no one gets **their** entire supply away from **them** to throw down the wastepipe. As matters grow worse, **they** begin to use a combination of high-powered sedatives and liquor to quiet **their** nerves so **they** can go to work. Then comes the day when **they** simply cannot make it and get drunk all over again. Perhaps **they** go to a doctor who give **them** morphine or some sedatives with which to taper off. Then **they** begin to appear at hospitals and sanitariums.

This is by no means a comprehensive picture of true alcoholics, as our behavior patterns vary. But this description should identify **them** roughly.

Why do **they** behave like this? If hundreds of experiences have shown **them** that one drink means another debacle with all its attendant suffering and humiliation, why is it **they** take that one drink? Why can't **they** stay on the water wagon? What has become of the common sense and will power that **they** still sometimes display with respect to other matters?

Perhaps there never will be a full answer to these questions. Opinions vary considerably as to why alcoholics reacts differently from normal people. We are not sure why, once a certain point is reached, little can be done for **them**. We cannot answer the riddle. We know that while alcoholics keep away from drink, as **they** may so for months or years, **they** react much like other **people**. We are equally positive that once **they** take any alcohol whatever into **their** systems, something happens, both in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for **them** to stop. The experience of any alcoholic will abundantly confirm this.

These observations would be academic and pointless if our friends never took the first drink, thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. Therefore, the main problem of alcoholics centers in **their minds**, rather than in **their bodies**. If you ask **them** why **they** started on that last bender, the chances are **they** will offer you any one of a hundred alibis. Sometimes these excuses have a certain plausibility, but none of them really makes sense in the light of the havoc an alcoholic's drinking bout creates. They sound like the philosophy of the **people** who, having a headache, beat **themselves** on the head with a hammer so that **they** can't feel the ache. If you draw this fallacious reasoning to **their** attention, **they** will laugh it off, or become irritated and refuse to talk.

Once in a while **they** may tell the truth. And the truth, strange to say, is usually that **they have** no more idea why **they** took that first drink than you have. Some drinkers have excuses with which they are satisfied part of the time. But in their hearts they really do not know why they do it. Once this malady has a real hold, they are a baffled lot. There is the obsession that somehow, someday, they will beat the game. But they often suspect they are down for the count.

How true this is, few realize. In a vague way their families and friends sense that these drinkers are abnormal, but everybody hopefully awaits the day when the sufferers will rouse **themselves** from **their** lethargy and assert **their** powers of will. The tragic truth is that if the **people are** real alcoholics, the happy day may not arrive. **They have** lost control. At a certain point in the drinking of every alcoholic,

they pass into a state where the most powerful desire to stop drinking is of absolutely no avail. This tragic situation has already arrived in practically every case long before it is suspected.

*The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink.*

The almost certain consequences that follow taking even a glass of beer do not crowd into the mind to deter us. If these thoughts occur, they are hazy and readily supplanted with the old threadbare idea that this time we shall handle ourselves like other people. There is a complete failure of the kind of defense that keeps one from putting a hand on a hot stove.

Alcoholics may say to themselves in the most casual way, "It won't burn me this time, so here's how!" Or perhaps they don't think at all. How often have some of us begun to drink in this nonchalant way, and after the third or fourth, pounded on the bar and said to ourselves, "How did I ever get started again?" Only to have that thought supplanted by "Well, I'll stop with the sixth drink." Or "What's the use anyhow?"

When this sort of thinking is fully established in individuals with alcoholic tendencies, they have probably placed themselves beyond human aid, and unless locked up, may die or go permanently insane.

These stark and ugly facts have been confirmed by legions of alcoholics throughout history. But for the grace of a [higher power](#), there would have been thousands more convincing demonstrations. So many want to stop but cannot.

*There is a solution.* Almost none of us likes the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process requires for its successful consummation. But we saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it. When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, there was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet. We have found much [happiness](#) and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed.

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 [the](#) universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our [higher power](#) has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous. [It](#) has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves.

If you are as seriously alcoholic as we were, we believe there is no middle-of-the-road solution. We were in a position where life was becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there is no return through human aid, we had but two

alternatives: One was to go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could; and the other, to accept spiritual help. This we did because we honestly wanted to, and were willing to make the effort.

A certain American business man had ability, good sense, and high character. For years he had floundered from one sanitarium to another. He had consulted the best known American psychiatrists. Then he had gone to Europe, placing himself in the care of the celebrated physician (the psychiatrist, Dr. Jung) who prescribed for him. Though experience had made him skeptical, he finished his treatment with unusual confidence. His physical and mental condition were unusually good. Above all, he believed he had acquired such a profound knowledge of the inner workings of his mind and its hidden springs that relapse was unthinkable. Nevertheless, he was drunk in a short time. More baffling still, he could give himself no satisfactory explanation for his fall.

So he turned to this doctor, whom he admired, and asked him point-blank why he could not recover. He wished above all things to regain self-control. He seemed quite rational and well-balanced with respect to other problems. Yet he had no control whatever over alcohol. Why was this?

He begged the doctor to tell him the whole truth, and he got it. In the doctor's judgment he was utterly hopeless; he could never regain his position in society and he would have to place himself under lock and key or hire a bodyguard if he expected to live long. That was a great physician's opinion.

But this man still lives, and is a free man. He does not need a bodyguard nor is he confined. He can go anywhere on this earth where other free people may go without disaster, provided he remains willing to maintain a certain simple attitude.

Some of our alcoholic readers may think they can do without spiritual help. Let us tell you the rest of the conversation our friend had with his doctor.

The doctor said: "You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen one single case recover, where that state of mind existed to the extent that it does in you." Our friend felt as though the gates of hell had closed on him with a clang.

He said to the doctor, "Is there no exception?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, "there is. Exceptions to cases such as yours have been occurring since early times. Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences. To me these occurrences are phenomena. They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these [people](#) are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them. In fact, I have been trying to produce some such emotional rearrangements within you. With many individuals the methods which I employed are successful, but I have never been successful with an alcoholic of your description."

Upon hearing this, our friend was somewhat relieved, for he reflected that, after all, he was a good church member. This hope, however, was destroyed by the doctor's telling him that while his religious convictions were very good, in his case they did not spell the necessary vital spiritual experience.

Here was the terrible dilemma in which our friend found himself when he had the extraordinary experience, which as we have already told you, made him a free man.

We, in our turn, sought the same escape with all the desperation of drowning people. What seemed at first a flimsy reed, has proved to be the love of a power greater than ourselves. A new life has been given us or, if you prefer, “a design for living” that really works.

The distinguished American psychologist, William James, in his book *Varieties of Religious Experience*, indicates a multitude of ways in which people have discovered a higher power. We have no desire to convince anyone that there is only one way by which faith can be acquired. If what we have learned and felt and seen means anything at all, it means that all of us, whatever our race, creed, or color are connected to a power greater than ourselves with whom we may form a relationship upon simple and understandable terms as soon as we are willing and honest enough to try. Those having religious affiliations will find here nothing disturbing to their beliefs or ceremonies. There is no friction among us over such matters.

We think it no concern of ours what religious bodies our members identify themselves with as individuals. This should be an entirely personal affair which we each decides for ourselves in the light of past associations, or our present choice. Not all of us join religious bodies, but some of us favor such memberships.

In the following chapter, there appears an explanation of alcoholism, as we understand it, then a chapter addressed to the agnostic. Many who were **or are** in this class are now among our members. Surprisingly enough, we find such convictions no great obstacle to a spiritual experience.

Further on, clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered. These are followed by forty-three personal experiences (**not included in this edition**).

In the personal stories, **alcoholics** describe in **their** own language and from **their** own points of view the way **they** established **their** relationship with **a higher power**. These give a fair cross section of our membership and a clearcut idea of what has actually happened in their lives.

We hope no one will consider these self-revealing accounts in bad taste. Our hope is that many alcoholic **people**, desperately in need, will see these pages, and we believe that it is only by fully disclosing ourselves and our problems that they will be persuaded to say, "Yes, I am one of them too; I must have this thing."

## chapter 3

### **MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM**

MOST OF US have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics. People don't like to think they are bodily and mentally different from their fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday they will control and enjoy their drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death.

We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.

We alcoholics are people who have lost the ability to control our drinking. We know that no real alcoholic ever recovers control. All of us felt at times that we were regaining control, but such intervals—usually brief—were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. We are convinced that alcoholics of our type are in the grip of a progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better.

We are like people who have lost their legs; they never grow new ones. Neither does there appear to be any kind of treatment which will make alcoholics of our kind like other people. We have tried

every imaginable remedy. In some instances there has been brief recovery, followed always by a still worse relapse. Physicians who are familiar with alcoholism agree there is no such thing as making a normal drinker out of an alcoholic. Science may one day accomplish this, but it hasn't done so yet.

Despite all we can say, many who are real alcoholics are not going to believe they are in that class. By every form of self-deception and experimentation, they will try to prove themselves exceptions to the rule, therefore nonalcoholic. If **those who are** showing inability to control **their** drinking can do the right about-face and drink **moderately**, our hats are off to **them**. Heaven knows, we have tried hard enough and long enough to drink like other people!

Here are some of the methods we have tried: Drinking beer only, limiting the number of drinks, never drinking alone, never drinking in the morning, drinking only at home, never having it in the house, never drinking during business hours, drinking only at parties, switching from scotch to brandy, drinking only natural wines, agreeing to resign if ever drunk on the job, taking a trip, not taking a trip, swearing off forever (with and without a solemn oath), taking more physical exercise, reading inspirational books, going to health farms and sanitariums, accepting voluntary commitment to asylums—we could increase the list ad infinitum.

We do not like to pronounce any individual as alcoholic, but you can quickly diagnose yourself. Step over to the nearest barroom and try some controlled drinking. Try to drink and stop abruptly. Try it more

than once. It will not take long for you to decide, if you are honest with yourself about it. It may be worth a bad case of jitters if you get a full knowledge of your condition.

Though there is no way of proving it, we believe that early in our drinking careers most of us could have stopped drinking. But the difficulty is that few alcoholics have enough desire to stop while there is yet time. We have heard of a few instances where people, who showed definite signs of alcoholism, were able to stop for a long period because of an overpowering desire to do so. Here is one.\*

A man of thirty was doing a great deal of spree drinking. He was very nervous in the morning after these bouts and quieted himself with more liquor. He was ambitious to succeed in business, but saw that he would get nowhere if he drank at all. Once he started, he had no control whatever. He made up his mind that until he had been successful in business and had retired, he would not touch another drop. An exceptional man, he remained bone dry for twenty-five years and retired at the age of fifty-five, after a successful and happy business career. Then he fell victim to a belief which practically every alcoholic has—that his long period of sobriety and self-discipline had qualified him to drink as other people. Out came his carpet slippers and a bottle. In two months he was in a hospital, puzzled and humiliated. He tried to regulate his drinking for a while, making several trips to the hospital meantime. Then, gathering all his forces, he

*\* The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample. Ideally, the text would contain a greater variety of alcoholic stories (see the full text of the Big Book for such examples).*

attempted to stop altogether and found he could not. Every means of solving his problem which money could buy was at his disposal. Every attempt failed. Though a robust man at retirement, he went to pieces quickly and was dead within four years.

This case contains a powerful lesson. Most of us have believed that if we remained sober for a long stretch, we could thereafter drink normally. But here is a man who at fifty-five years found he was just where he had left off at thirty. We have seen the truth demonstrated again and again: "Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic." Commencing to drink after a period of sobriety, we are in a short time as bad as ever. If we are planning to stop drinking, there must be no reservation of any kind, nor any lurking notion that someday we will be immune to alcohol.

Young people may be encouraged by this man's experience to think that they can stop, as he did, on their own will power. We doubt if many of them can do it, because none will really want to stop, and hardly one of them, because of the peculiar mental twists already acquired, will find he can win out. Several of our crowd, [people](#) of thirty or less, had been drinking only a few years, but they found themselves as helpless as those who had been drinking twenty years.

To be gravely affected, one does not necessarily have to drink a long time nor take the quantities some of us have. Certain drinkers, who would be greatly insulted if called alcoholics, are astonished at their

inability to stop. We, who are familiar with the symptoms, see large numbers of potential alcoholics among young people everywhere. But try and get them to see it!\*

As we look back, we feel we had gone on drinking many years beyond the point where we could quit on our will power. If any **people** question whether **they have** entered this dangerous area, let **them** try leaving liquor alone for one year. If **they are** a real alcoholic and very far advanced, there is scant chance of success. In the early days of our drinking we occasionally remained sober for a year or more, becoming serious drinkers again later. Though you may be able to stop for a considerable period, you may yet be a potential alcoholic. We think few, to whom this book will appeal, can stay dry anything like a year. Some will be drunk the day after making their resolutions; most of them within a few weeks.

For those who are unable to drink moderately the question is how to stop altogether. We are assuming, of course, that the reader desires to stop. Whether such a person can quit upon a nonspiritual basis depends upon the extent to which he has already lost the power to choose whether he will drink or not. Many of us felt that we had plenty of character. There was a tremendous urge to cease forever. Yet we found it impossible. This is the baffling feature of alcoholism as we know it—this utter inability to leave it alone, no matter how great the necessity or the wish.

How then shall we help our readers determine, to their own satisfaction, whether they are one of us? The experiment of quitting for a period of time will be helpful, but we think we can render an even

\* *True when this book was first published, but a 2014 U.S./Canada membership survey showed about 12% of A.A.s were thirty and under.*

greater service to alcoholic sufferers and perhaps to the medical fraternity. So we shall describe some of the mental states that precede a relapse into drinking, for obviously this is the crux of the problem.

What sort of thinking dominates alcoholics who repeat time after time the desperate experiment of the first drink? Friends who have reasoned with them after a spree which has brought them to the point of divorce or bankruptcy are mystified when they walk directly into the saloon. Why do they? Of what are they thinking?

Our first example is a friend we shall call Jim\*. This man has a charming wife and family. He inherited a lucrative automobile agency. He had a commendable World War record. He is a good salesman. Everybody likes him. He is an intelligent man, normal so far as we can see, except for a nervous disposition. He did not drink until he was thirty-five. In a few years he became so violent when intoxicated that he had to be committed. On leaving the asylum he came into contact with us.

We told him what we knew of alcoholism and the answer we had found. He made a beginning. His family was re-assembled, and he began to work as a salesman for the business he had lost through drinking. All went well for a time, but he failed to enlarge his spiritual life. To his consternation, he found himself drunk half a dozen times in rapid succession. On each of these occasions we worked with him, reviewing carefully what had happened. He agreed he was a real alcoholic and in a serious condition. He knew he faced another trip to the asylum if he kept on. Moreover, he would lose his family for whom he had a deep affection.

\*The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.

Yet he got drunk again. We asked him to tell us exactly how it happened. This is his story: "I came to work on Tuesday morning. I remembered I felt irritated that I had to be a salesman for a concern I once owned. I had a few words with the boss, but nothing serious. Then I decided to drive into the country and see one of my prospects for a car. On the way I felt hungry so I stopped at a roadside place where they have a bar. I had no intention of drinking. I just thought I would get a sandwich. I also had the notion that I might find a customer for a car at this place, which was familiar for I had been going to it for years. I had eaten there many times during the months I was sober. I sat down at a table and ordered a sandwich and a glass of milk. Still no thought of drinking. I ordered another sandwich and decided to have another glass of milk.

*"Suddenly the thought crossed my mind that if I were to put an ounce of whiskey in my milk it couldn't hurt me on a full stomach. I ordered a whiskey and poured it into the milk. I vaguely sensed I was not being any too smart, but felt reassured as I was taking the whiskey on a full stomach. The experiment went so well that I ordered another whiskey and poured it into more milk. That didn't seem to bother me so I tried another."*

Thus started one more journey to the asylum for Jim. Here was the threat of commitment, the loss of family and position, to say nothing of that intense mental and physical suffering which drinking always caused him. *He had much knowledge about himself as an alcoholic. Yet all reasons for not drinking were easily pushed aside in favor of the foolish idea that he could take whiskey if only he mixed it with milk!*

Whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call this plain insanity. How can such a lack of proportion, of the ability to think straight, be called anything else?

You may think this an extreme case. To us it is not far-fetched, for this kind of thinking has been characteristic of every single one of us. We have sometimes reflected more than Jim did upon the consequences. But there was always the curious mental phenomenon that parallel with our sound reasoning there inevitable ran some insanely trivial excuse for taking the first drink. Our sound reasoning failed to hold us in check. The insane idea won out. Next day we would ask ourselves, in all earnestness and sincerity, how it could have happened.

In some circumstances we have gone out deliberately to get drunk, feeling ourselves justified by nervousness, anger, worry, depression, jealousy or the like. But even in this type of beginning we are obliged to admit that our justification for a spree was insanely insufficient in the light of what always happened. We now see that when we began to drink deliberately, instead of casually, there was little serious or effective thought during the period of premeditation of what the terrific consequences might be.

Our behavior is as absurd and incomprehensible with respect to the first drink as that of [people](#) with a passion, say, for jay-walking. [They](#) get a thrill out of skipping in front of fast-moving vehicles. [They](#) enjoy [themselves](#) for a few years in spite of friendly warnings. Up to this point you would label [them](#) as foolish [people](#) having queer ideas of

fun. Luck then deserts **them** and **they are** slightly injured several times in succession. You would expect **them**, if **they** were normal, to cut it out. Presently **they are** hit again and this time **injured more seriously**. **Shortly** after leaving the hospital **another accident leaves them with broken limbs**. **They** tell you **they have** decided to stop jay-walking for good, but in a few weeks **they can no longer walk**.

On through the years this conduct continues, accompanied by **their** continual promises to be careful or to keep off the streets altogether. Finally, **they** can no longer work, **their partners seek** divorce and **they are** held up to ridicule. **They try** every known means to get the jay-walking idea out of **their** heads. **They** shut **themselves** up in asylums, hoping to mend **their** ways. But the day **they** come out **they** race in front of **larger vehicles**, which break **their** backs. Such **people** would be crazy, wouldn't **they**?

You may think our illustration is too ridiculous. But is it? We, who have been through the wringer, have to admit if we substituted alcoholism for jay-walking, the illustration would fit us exactly. However intelligent we may have been in other respects, where alcohol has been involved, we have been strangely insane. It's strong language—but isn't it true?

Some of you are thinking: "Yes, what you tell us is true, but it doesn't fully apply. We admit we have some of these symptoms, but we have not gone to the extremes you **folks** did, nor are we likely to, for we understand ourselves so well after what you have told us that such things cannot happen again. We have not lost everything in life through drinking and we certainly do not intend to. Thanks for the information."

That may be true of certain nonalcoholic people who, though drinking foolishly and heavily at the present time, are able to stop or moderate, because their brains and bodies have not been damaged as ours were. But the actual or potential alcoholic, with hardly an exception, will be *absolutely unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge*. This is a point we wish to emphasize and re-emphasize, to smash home upon our alcoholic readers as it has been revealed to us out of bitter experience. Let us take another illustration.

Fred\* is partner in a well known accounting firm. His income is good, he has a fine home, is happily married and the father of promising children of college age. He had so attractive a personality that he makes friends with everyone. If ever there was a successful business man, it is Fred. To all appearance he is a stable, well balanced individual. Yet, he is alcoholic. We first saw Fred about a year ago in a hospital where he had gone to recover from a bad case of jitters. It was his first experience of this kind, and he was much ashamed of it. Far from admitting he was an alcoholic, he told himself he came to the hospital to rest his nerves. The doctor intimated strongly that he might be worse than he realized. For a few days he was depressed about his condition. He made up his mind to quit drinking altogether. It never occurred to him that perhaps he could not do so, in spite of his character and standing. Fred would not believe himself an alcoholic, much less accept a spiritual remedy for his problem. We told him what we knew about alcoholism. He was interested and conceded that he had some of the symptoms, but he was a long way from

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admitting that he could do nothing about it himself. He was positive that this humiliating experience, plus the knowledge he had acquired, would keep him sober the rest of his life. Self-knowledge would fix it.

We heard no more of Fred for a while. One day we were told that he was back in the hospital. This time he was quite shaky. He soon indicated he was anxious to see us. The story he told is most instructive, for here was a chap absolutely convinced he had to stop drinking, who had no excuse for drinking, who exhibited splendid judgment and determination in all his other concerns, yet was flat on his back nevertheless.

Let him tell you about it: "I was much impressed with what you folks said about alcoholism, and I frankly did not believe it would be possible for me to drink again. I rather appreciated your ideas about the subtle insanity which precedes the first drink, but I was confident it could not happen to me after what I had learned. I reasoned I was not so far advanced as most of you folks, that I had been usually successful in licking my other personal problems, and that I would therefore be successful where you all had failed. I felt I had every right to be self-confident, that it would be only a matter of exercising my will power and keeping on guard.

"In this frame of mind, I went about my business and for a time all was well. I had no trouble refusing drinks, and began to wonder if I had not been making too hard work of a simple matter. One day I went to Washington to present some accounting evidence to a

government bureau. I had been out of town before during this particular dry spell, so there was nothing new about that. Physically, I felt fine. Neither did I have any pressing problems or worries. My business came off well, I was pleased and knew my partners would be too. It was the end of a perfect day, not a cloud on the horizon.

“I went to my hotel and leisurely dressed for dinner. *As I crossed the threshold of the dining room, the thought came to mind that it would be nice to have a couple of cocktails with dinner. That was all. Nothing more.* I ordered a cocktail and my meal. Then I ordered another cocktail. After dinner I decided to take a walk. When I returned to the hotel it struck me a highball would be fine before going to bed, so I stepped into the bar and had one. I remember having several more that night and plenty next morning. I have a shadowy recollection of being in an airplane bound for New York, and of finding a friendly taxicab driver at the landing field instead of my wife. The driver escorted me about for several days. I know little of where I went or what I said and did. Then came the hospital with unbearable mental and physical suffering.

“As soon as I regained my ability to think, I went carefully over that evening in Washington. *Not only had I been off guard, I had made no fight whatever against the first drink. This time I had not thought of the consequences at all.* I had commenced to drink as carelessly as though the cocktails were ginger ale. I now remembered what my alcoholic friends had told me, how they prophesied that if I had an alcoholic mind, the time and place would come—I would drink again.

They had said that though I did raise a defense, it would one day give way before some trivial reason for having a drink. Well, just that did happen and more, for what I had learned of alcoholism did not occur to me at all. I know from that moment that I had an alcoholic mind. I saw that will power and self-knowledge would not help in those strange mental blank spots. I had never been able to understand people who said that a problem had them hopelessly defeated. I knew then. It was a crushing blow.

“Two of the members of Alcoholics Anonymous came to see me. They grinned, which I didn’t like so much, and then asked me if I thought myself alcoholic and if I were really licked this time. I had to concede both propositions. They piled on me heaps of evidence to the effect that an alcoholic mentality, such as I had exhibited in Washington, was a hopeless condition. They cited cases out of their own experience by the dozen. This process snuffed out the last flicker of conviction that I could do the job myself.

“Then they outlined the spiritual answer and program of action which a hundred of them had followed successfully. Though I had been only a nominal churchman, their proposals were not, intellectually, hard to swallow. But the program of action, though entirely sensible, was pretty drastic. It meant I would have to throw several lifelong conceptions out of the window. That was not easy. But the moment I made up my mind to go through with the process, I had the curious feeling that my alcoholic condition was relieved, as in fact it proved to be.

“Quite as important was the discovery that spiritual principles would solve all my problems. I have since been brought into a way of living infinitely more satisfying and, I hope, more useful than the life I lived before. My old manner of life was by no means a bad one, but I would not exchange its best moments for the worst I have now. I would not go back to it even if I could.”

Fred’s story speaks for itself. We hope it strikes home to thousands like him. He had felt only the first nip of the wringer. Most alcoholics have to be pretty badly mangled before they really commence to solve their problems.

Many doctors and psychiatrists agree with our conclusions. One of these [medical professionals](#), staff member of a world renowned hospital, recently made this statement to some of us: “What you say about the general hopelessness of the average alcoholic’s plight is, in my opinion, correct. As to two of you, whose stories I have heard, there is no doubt in my mind that you were 100% hopeless, apart from divine help. Had you offered yourselves as patients at this hospital, I would not have taken you, if I had been able to avoid it. People like you are too heartbreaking. Though not a religious person, I have profound respect for the spiritual approach in such cases as yours. For most cases, there is virtually no other solution.”

Once more: The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink. Except in a few rare cases, neither [the alcoholic](#) nor any other human being can provide such a defense. [This](#) defense must come from a [higher power](#).

## chapter 4

### WE AGNOSTICS

IN THE PRECEDING chapters you have learned something of alcoholism. We hope we have made clear the distinction between the alcoholic and the nonalcoholic. If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.

To **those** who feel **they are** atheists or agnostics such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as **they are** means disaster, especially if **they are** alcoholics of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis are not always easy alternatives to face.

But it isn't so difficult. About half our original fellowship were of exactly that type. At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, hoping against hope we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life—or else. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted.

If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no

matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could will these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshalled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly.

Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a *power greater than ourselves*. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this power?

Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a power greater than yourself which will solve your problem. That means we have written a book which we believe to be spiritual as well as moral. And it means, of course, that we are going to talk about spiritual belief. Here difficulty arises with agnostics. Many times we talk to new members and watch their hope rise as we discuss their alcoholic problems and explain our fellowship. But their faces fall when we speak of spiritual matters, especially when we mention a higher power, for we have re-opened a subject which they thought they had neatly evaded or entirely ignored.

We know how they feel. We have shared their honest doubt and prejudice. Some of us have been violently anti-religious. To others, the word "God" brought up a particular idea of a higher power with which someone had tried to impress them during childhood. Perhaps we rejected this particular conception because it seemed inadequate. With that rejection we imagined we had abandoned the spiritual idea entirely. We were bothered with the thought that faith and dependence upon a power beyond ourselves was somewhat weak, even cowardly. We looked upon this world of warring individuals,

warring theological systems, and inexplicable calamity, with deep skepticism. We looked askance at many individuals who claimed to be **spiritual**. How could a **higher power** have anything to do with it all? And who could comprehend a **higher power** anyhow? Yet, in other moments, we found ourselves thinking, when enchanted by a starlit night, “**How did all this come about?**” There was a feeling of awe and wonder, but it was fleeting and soon lost.

Yes, we of agnostic temperament have had these thoughts and experiences. Let us make haste to reassure you. 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**.

Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of **higher power**. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with **it**. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a **higher power**, a **universal force** underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, provided we took other simple steps. We found that **a higher power** does not make too hard terms with those who seek **it**. To us, the **realm of spirit** is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all **people**.

When, therefore, we speak to you of a **higher power**, we mean your own conception of **higher power**. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with a **higher power** as we understood it. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So we used our own conception, however limited it was.

We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a **power** greater than myself?" As soon as **people** can say that **they do** believe, or **are** willing to believe, we emphatically assure **them** that **they are** on **their** way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built.

That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual principles unless we accepted many things on faith which seemed difficult to believe. When people presented us with spiritual approaches, how frequently did we all say, "I wish I had what **those people have**. I'm sure it would work if I could only believe as **they** believe. But I cannot accept as surely true the many articles of faith which are so plain to **them**." So it was comforting to learn that we could commence at a simpler level.

Besides a seeming inability to accept much on faith, we often found ourselves handicapped by obstinacy, sensitiveness, and unreasoning prejudice. Many of us have been so touchy that even casual reference to spiritual things made us bristle with antagonism. This sort of thinking had to be abandoned. Though some of us resisted, we found no great difficulty in casting aside such feelings. Faced with alcoholic destruction, we soon became as open minded on spiritual matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect alcohol was a great persuader. It finally beat us into a state of reasonableness. Sometimes this was a tedious process; we hope no one else will be prejudiced for as long as some of us were.

Readers may still ask why they should believe in a power greater than themselves. We think there are good reasons. Let us have a look at some of them.

The practical individual of today is a stickler for facts and results. Nevertheless, the twentieth century readily accepts theories of all kinds, provided they are firmly grounded in fact. We have numerous theories, for example, about electricity. Everybody believes them without a murmur of doubt. Why this ready acceptance? Simply because it is impossible to explain what we see, feel, direct, and use, without a reasonable assumption as a starting point.

Everybody nowadays, believes in scores of assumptions for which there is good evidence, but no perfect visual proof. And does not science demonstrate that visual proof is the weakest proof? It is being constantly revealed, as mankind studies the material world, that outward appearances are not inward reality at all. To illustrate:

The prosaic steel girder is a mass of electrons whirling around each other at incredible speed. These tiny bodies are governed by precise laws, and these laws hold true throughout the material world. Science tells us so. We have no reason to doubt it. When, however, the perfectly logical assumption is suggested that underneath the material world and life as we see it, there is a [guiding force](#), right there our perverse streak comes to the surface and we laboriously set out to convince ourselves it isn't so. We read wordy books and indulge in windy arguments, thinking we believe this universe needs no [higher power](#) to explain it. Were our contentions true, it would follow that life originated out of nothing, means nothing, and proceeds nowhere.

Instead of regarding ourselves as intelligent agents [of a power greater than ourselves](#), we agnostics and atheists chose to believe that our human intelligence was the last word, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and end of all. Rather vain of us, wasn't it?

We, who have traveled the dubious path, beg you to lay aside prejudice, even against organized religion. We have learned that whatever the human frailties of various faiths may be, those faiths have given purpose and direction to millions. People of faith have a logical idea of what life is all about. Actually, we used to have no reasonable conception whatever. We used to amuse ourselves by cynically dissecting spiritual beliefs and practices when we might have observed that many spiritually-minded persons of all races, colors, and creeds were demonstrating a degree of stability, happiness and usefulness which we should have sought ourselves.

Instead, we looked at the human defects of these people, and sometimes used their shortcomings as a basis of wholesale condemnation. We talked of intolerance, while we were intolerant ourselves. We missed the reality and the beauty of the forest because we were diverted by the ugliness of some of its trees. We never gave the spiritual side of life a fair hearing.

In our personal stories you will find a wide variation in the way tellers approach and conceive of a power which is greater than themselves. Whether we agree with a particular approach or conception seems to make little difference. Experience has taught us that these are matters about which, for our purpose, we need not be worried. They are questions for individuals to settle for themselves.

On one proposition, however, these people are strikingly agreed. Every one of them has gained access to, and believes in, a higher power. This power has in each case accomplished the miraculous, the humanly impossible. As a celebrated American put it, "Let's look at the record."

Here are thousands of people, worldly indeed. They flatly declare that since they have come to believe in a power greater than themselves, to take a certain attitude toward the power, and to do certain simple things, there has been a revolutionary change in their way of living and thinking. In the face of collapse and despair, in the face of the total failure of their human resources, they found that a new power, peace, happiness, and sense of direction flowed into them. This happened soon after they wholeheartedly met a few simple

requirements. Once confused and baffled by the seeming futility of existence, they show the underlying reasons why they were making heavy going of life. Leaving aside the drink question, they tell why living was so unsatisfactory. They show how the change came over them. When many hundreds of people are able to say that the consciousness of the presence of a higher power is today the most important fact of their lives, they present a powerful reason why one should have faith.

This world of ours has made more material progress in the last century than in all the millenniums which went before. Almost everyone knows the reason. Students of ancient history tell us that the intellect of people in those days was equal to the best of today. Yet in ancient times material progress was painfully slow. The spirit of modern scientific inquiry, research and invention was almost unknown. In the realm of the material, people's minds were fettered by superstition, tradition, and all sorts of fixed ideas. Some of the contemporaries of Columbus thought a round earth preposterous. Others came near putting Galileo to death for his astronomical heresies.

We asked ourselves this: Are not some of us just as biased and unreasonable about the realm of the spirit as were the ancients about the realm of the material? Even in the present century, American newspapers were afraid to print an account of the Wright brothers' first successful flight at Kitty Hawk. Had not all efforts at flight failed before? Did not Professor Langley's flying machine go to the bottom of the Potomac River? Was it not true that the best mathematical

minds have proved **humans** could never fly? Had not people said **that** this privilege **was reserved for** the birds? Only thirty years later **flight** was almost an old story and airplane travel was in full swing.

But in most fields our generation has witnessed complete liberation of our thinking. Show any **laborers** a Sunday supplement describing a proposal to explore the moon by means of a rocket and **they** will say, "I bet they do it—maybe not so long either." Is not our age characterized by the ease with which we discard old ideas for new, by the complete readiness with which we throw away the theory or gadget which does not work for something new which does?

We had to ask ourselves why we shouldn't apply to our human problems this same readiness to change our point of view. We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people—was not a basic solution of these **torments** more important than whether we should see newsreels of lunar flight? Of course it was.

When we saw others solve their problems by a simple reliance upon the **spirit of the universe**, we had to stop doubting **our higher power**. Our ideas did not work. But the **higher power** idea did.

The Wright brothers' almost childish faith that they could build a machine which would fly was the mainspring of their accomplishments. Without that, nothing could have happened. We agnostics

and atheists were sticking to the idea that self-sufficiency would solve our problems. When others showed us that “higher-power-sufficiency” worked with them, we began to feel like those who had insisted the Wrights would never fly.

Logic is great stuff. We liked it. We still like it. It is not by chance we were given the power to reason, to examine the evidence of our senses, and to draw conclusions. That is one of our species’ magnificent attributes. We agnostically inclined would not feel satisfied with a proposal which does not lend itself to reasonable approach and interpretation. Hence we are at pains to tell why we think our present faith is reasonable, why we think it more sane and logical to believe than not to believe, why we say our former thinking was soft and mushy when we threw up our hands in doubt and said, “We don’t know.”

When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either our higher power is everything or else it is nothing. It either is, or it isn’t. What was our choice to be?

Arrived at this point, we were squarely confronted with the question of faith. We couldn’t duck the issue. Some of us had already walked far over the Bridge of Reason toward the desired shore of faith. The outlines and the promise of the new land had brought lustre to tired eyes and fresh courage to flagging spirits. Friendly hands had stretched out in welcome. We were grateful that Reason had brought us so far. But somehow, we couldn’t quite step ashore. Perhaps we had been leaning too heavily on Reason that last mile and we did not like to lose our support.

That was natural, but let us think a little more closely. Without knowing it, had we not been brought to where we stood by a certain kind of faith? For did we not believe in our own reasoning? Did we not have confidence in our ability to think? What was that but a sort of faith? Yes, we had been faithful, abjectly faithful to Reason. So, in one way or another, we discovered that faith had been involved all the time!

We found, too, that we had been worshippers. What a state of mental goose-flesh that used to bring on! Had we not variously worshipped people, sentiment, things, money, and ourselves? And then, with a better motive, had we not worshipfully beheld the sunset, the sea, or a flower? Who of us had not loved something or somebody? How much did these feelings, these loves, these worships, have to do with pure reason? Little or nothing, we saw at last. Were not these things the tissue out of which our lives were constructed? Did not these feelings, after all, determine the course of our existence? It was impossible to say we had no capacity for faith, or love, or worship. In one form or another we had been living by faith and little else.

Imagine life without faith! Were nothing left but pure reason, it wouldn't be life. But we believed in life—of course we did. We could not prove life in the sense that you can prove a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, yet, there it was. Could we still say the whole thing was nothing but a mass of electrons, created out of nothing, meaning nothing, whirling on to a destiny of nothingness? Of course we couldn't. The electrons themselves seemed more intelligent than that. At least, so the chemist said.

Hence, we saw that reason isn't everything. Neither is reason, as most of us use it, entirely dependable, though it emanate from our best minds. What about people who proved that [humans](#) could never fly?

Yet we had been seeing another kind of flight, a spiritual liberation from this world, people who rose above their problems. They said God made these things possible, and we only smiled. We had seen spiritual release, but liked to tell ourselves it wasn't true.

Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in **all of us**, is the fundamental idea of **connection**. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there. For faith in a **power** greater than ourselves, and miraculous demonstrations of that power in human lives, are facts as old as man himself.

We finally saw that faith in some kind of **higher power** was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but **it** was there. **It** was as much a fact as we were. We found the **great reality** deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that **it** may be found. It was so with us.

We can only clear the ground a bit. If our testimony helps sweep away prejudice, enables you to think honestly, encourages you to search diligently within yourself, then, if you wish, you can join us on the "Broad Highway." With this attitude you cannot fail. The consciousness of your belief is sure to come to you.

In this book you will read the experience of a man who thought he was an atheist. His story is so interesting that some of it should be told now. His change of heart was dramatic, convincing, and moving.

Our friend was a minister's son. He attended church school, where he became rebellious at what he thought an overdose of religious education. For years thereafter he was dogged by trouble and frustration. Business failure, insanity, fatal illness, suicide— these calamities in his immediate family embittered and depressed him. Post-war disillusionment, ever more serious alcoholism, impending mental and physical collapse, brought him to the point of self-destruction.

One night, when confined in a hospital, he was approached by an alcoholic who had known a spiritual experience. Our friend's gorge rose as he bitterly cried out: "If there is a **higher power**, it certainly hasn't done anything for me!" But later, alone in his room, he asked himself this question: "Is it possible that all the **spiritual** people I have known are wrong?" While pondering the answer he felt as though he lived in hell. Then, like a thunderbolt, a great thought came. It crowded out all else:

*"Who are you to say there is no **higher power**?"*

This man recounts that he tumbled out of bed to his knees. In a few seconds he was overwhelmed by a conviction of the **presence of a power greater than himself**. It poured over and through him with the certainty and majesty of a great tide at flood. The barriers he had built through the years were swept away. He stood in the **presence of infinite power and love**. He had stepped from bridge to shore. For the first time, he lived in conscious companionship with his **Higher Power**.

Thus was our friend's cornerstone fixed in place. No later vicissitude had shaken it. His alcoholic problem was taken away. That very night,

years ago, it disappeared. Save for a few brief moments of temptation the thought of drink had never returned; and at such times a great revulsion had risen up in him. Seemingly he could not drink even if he would. His higher power had restored his sanity.

What is this but a miracle of healing? Yet its elements are simple. Circumstances made him willing to believe. He humbly offered himself to his higher power— then he knew.

Even so has our higher power restored us all to our right minds. To this man, the revelation was sudden. Some of us grow into it more slowly. But it has come to all who have honestly sought it.

When we drew near to a power greater than ourselves, it disclosed itself to us!

## chapter 5

### HOW IT WORKS

RARELY HAVE WE seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover [using this method](#) are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually [people who struggle with honest self-appraisal](#). There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty [is challenging for them](#). Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from great emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps.

At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that we deal with alcohol—cunning, baffling, powerful!

Without help it is too much for us. But **with a source of power outside ourselves, we can recover**—we call this a higher power.

Half measures availed us **nothing**. We stood at the turning point. We asked **our higher power for** protection and care with complete abandon.

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery:

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 **our higher power** as we understood it.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to **our higher power**, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have **our higher power** remove all these **harmful traits**.
7. Humbly asked **our higher power** 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 a higher power as we understood it, praying only for knowledge of right action 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.

Many of us exclaimed, "What an order! I can't go through with it." Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not heroes. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after make clear three pertinent ideas:

- a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.
- b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.
- c) That a higher power could and would if it were sought.

Being convinced, we were at *Step Three*, which is that we decided to turn our will and our life over to our higher power as we understood it. Just what do we mean by that, and just what do we do?

The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Most people try to live by self-propulsion. We are like

actors who want to run the whole show; are forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in our own way. If our arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as we wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including ourselves, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make these arrangements we may sometimes be quite virtuous. We may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, we may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But as with most humans, we are more likely to have varied traits.

What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. We begin to think life doesn't treat us right. We decide to exert ourselves more. We become, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit us. Admitting we may be somewhat at fault, we are sure that other people are more to blame. We become angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is our basic trouble? Are we not really self-seekers even when trying to be kind? Are we not victims of the delusion that we can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if only we manage well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things we want? And do not our actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show? Are we not, even in our best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony?

As actors, we are self-centered—ego-centric, as people like to call it nowadays. We are like the retired business folk who loll in the Florida sunshine in the winter complaining of the sad state of the nation; politicians and reformers who are sure all would be Utopia

if the rest of the world would only behave; the outlaw safe crackers who thinks society has wronged **them**; and the alcoholic who has lost all and is locked up. Whatever our protestations, are not most of us concerned with ourselves, our resentments, or our self-pity?

Selfishness—self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt.

So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and alcoholics **are** an extreme example of self-will run riot, though **they** usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of the selfishness. We must, or it kills us! **A higher power** makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without **its** aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have **our higher power's** help.

This is the how and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing **the higher power ourselves**. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, **that higher power** was going to be our **director**. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom.

When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new **purpose**. **Our higher power** provided what we needed, if we kept close to **it** and **took right action**. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of **our higher power's** presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn.

We were now at Step Three. Many of us said to our **higher power**, *as we understood it*: “**Higher power**, I offer myself to **you**—to build with me and to do with me as **you will**. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do **good**. **Help me be of use to others with your power, your love, and your way of life. May I live in gratitude and service.**” We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to **a power greater than ourselves**.

We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person, such as our **partner**, best friend, or spiritual adviser. But it is better to meet **our higher power** alone than with one who might misunderstand. The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation. This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, and effort, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once.

Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted. Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could

have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us. Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.

Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. *This was Step Four.* A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If business owners are to be successful, they cannot fool themselves about values.

We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we search out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations.

Resentment is the “number one” offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically. In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry. In most cases it was found that our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships (including sex) were hurt or threatened. So we were sore. We were “burned up.”

On our grudge list we set opposite each name our injuries. Was it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal, or sex relations, which had been interfered with?

We were usually as definite as this example:

<i>I'm resentful at:</i>	<i>The Cause:</i>	<i>Affects my:</i>
Mr. Brown	His attention to my partner.	Sex relations. Self-esteem (fear)
	Told my partner of my affair.	Sex relations. Self-esteem (fear)
	Brown may get my job at the office.	Security. Self-esteem (fear)
Mrs. Jones	She's a nut—she snubbed me. She committed her partner (my friend) for drinking. She's a gossip.	Personal relationship. Self-esteem (fear)
My employer	Unreasonable—Unjust—Overbearing—Threatens to fire me for drinking and padding my expense account.	Self-esteem (fear) Security.
My partner	Misunderstands and nags. Likes Brown. Wants house put in name.	Pride—Personal sex relations— Security (fear)

We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were finished we considered it carefully. The first thing apparent was that this world and its people were often

quite wrong. To conclude that others were wrong was as far as most of us ever got. The usual outcome was that people continued to wrong us and we stayed sore. Sometimes it was remorse and then we were sore at ourselves. But the more we fought and tried to have our own way, the worse matters got. As in war, the victor only *seemed* to win. Our moments of triumph were short-lived.

It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worth while. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the [spirit](#). The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die.

If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. The grouch and the brainstorm were not for us. They may be the dubious luxury of normal [people](#), but for alcoholics these things are poison. We turned back to the list, for it held the key to the future. We were prepared to look for it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrongdoing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol.

This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick

too. We asked [our higher power](#) to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, “This is a sick [individual](#). How can I be helpful? [Let me turn my anger over to my higher power and act with compassion.](#)” We avoid retaliation or argument. We wouldn’t treat sick people that way. If we do, we destroy our chance of being helpful. We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least [our higher power](#) will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one.

Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other [person’s](#). When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight.

Notice that the word “fear” is bracketed alongside the difficulties with Mr. Brown, Mrs. Jones, the employer, and the wife. This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It was a [toxic](#) and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn’t deserve. But did not we, ourselves, set the ball rolling? Sometimes we think fear ought to be classed with stealing. It seems to cause more trouble.

We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them. We asked ourselves why we had them. Wasn't it because self-reliance failed us? Self-reliance was good as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough. Some of us once had great self-confidence, but it didn't fully solve the fear problem, or any other. When it made us cocky, it was worse.

Perhaps there is a better way—we think so. For we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon a **power greater than ourselves**. We trust **this infinite power** rather than our finite selves. Just to the extent that we **act in accordance with our higher power**, and humbly rely on **it, are we able** to match calamity with serenity.

We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our **higher power**. We can laugh at those who think spirituality the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. **Trusting a higher power takes courage**. We never apologize for **our spirituality**. Instead we let **it** demonstrate, through us, what **it** can do. We ask **our higher power** to **ease** our fear and direct our attention to what **is most important**. At once, we commence to outgrow fear.

Now about sex. Many of us needed an overhauling there. But above all, we tried to be sensible on this question. It's so easy to get way off the track. Here we find human opinions running to extremes—absurd extremes, perhaps. One set of voices cry that sex is a lust of our lower nature, a base necessity of procreation. Then we have the

voices who cry for sex and more sex; who bewail the institution of marriage; who think that most of the troubles of the race are traceable to sex causes. They think we do not have enough of it, or that it isn't the right kind. They see its significance everywhere. One school would allow us no flavor for our fare and the other would have us all on a straight pepper diet. We want to stay out of this controversy. We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone's sex conduct. We all have sex problems. We'd hardly be human if we didn't. What can we do about them?

We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it.

In this way we tried to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life. We subjected each relation to this test—was it selfish or not? We asked our higher power to mold our ideals and help us to live up to them. We remembered always that our sex powers were natural and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly nor to be despised and loathed.

Whatever our ideal turns out to be, we must be willing to grow toward it. We must be willing to make amends where we have done harm, provided that we do not bring about still more harm in so doing. In other words, we treat sex as we would any other problem. In meditation, we ask our higher power what we should do about each specific matter. The right answer will come, if we want it.

It is not the job of anyone else to judge our sex situation. Counsel with persons is often desirable, but we let our higher power be the final judge. We realize that some people are as fanatical about sex as others are loose. We avoid hysterical thinking or advice.

Suppose we fall short of the chosen ideal and stumble? Does this mean we are going to get drunk? Some people tell us so. But this is only a half-truth. It depends on us and on our motives. If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson. If we are not sorry, and our conduct continues to harm others, we are quite sure to drink. We are not theorizing. These are facts out of our experience.

To sum up about sex: We earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing. If sex is very troublesome, we throw ourselves the harder into helping others. We think of their needs and work for them. This takes us out of ourselves. It quiets the imperious urge, when to yield would mean heartache.

If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments. We have begun to comprehend their futility and their fatality. We have commenced to see their terrible destructiveness. We have begun to learn tolerance, patience and good will toward all, even our enemies, for we look on them as sick people. We have listed the people we have hurt by our conduct, and are willing to straighten out the past if we can.

In this book you read again and again that faith did for us what we could not do for ourselves. We hope you are convinced now that **your higher power** can remove whatever self-will has blocked you off from **real connection**. If you have already made a decision, and an inventory of your grosser handicaps, you have made a good beginning. That being so you have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself.

## chapter 6

### INTO ACTION

HAVING MADE our personal inventory, what shall we do about it? We have been trying to get a new attitude, a new relationship with our **higher power**, and to discover the obstacles in our path. We have admitted certain **flaws**; we have ascertained in a rough way what the trouble is; we have put our finger on the real items in our personal inventory. Now these are about to be **improved**. This requires action on our part, which, when completed, will mean that we have admitted to **our higher power**, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our **wrongs**. This brings us to *the Fifth Step* in the program of recovery mentioned in the preceding chapter.

This is perhaps difficult—especially discussing our **flaws** with another person. We think we have done well enough in admitting these things to ourselves. There is doubt about that. In actual practice, we usually find a solitary self-appraisal insufficient. Many of us thought it necessary to go much further. We will be more reconciled to discussing ourselves with another person when we see good reasons why we should do so. The best reason first: If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier

methods. Almost invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only *thought* they had lost their egoism and fear; they only *thought* they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else all their life story.

More than most people, alcoholics lead double lives. They are very much actors. To the outer world they present their stage characters. This is the one they like their community to see. They want to enjoy a certain reputation, but know in their hearts they don't deserve it.

The inconsistency is made worse by the things they do on their sprees. Coming to their senses, they are revolted at certain episodes they vaguely remember. These memories are a nightmare. They tremble to think someone might have observed them. As fast as they can, they pushed these memories far inside themselves. They hope they will never see the light of day. They are under constant fear and tension—that makes for more drinking.

Psychologists are inclined to agree with us. We have spent thousands of dollars for examinations. We know but few instances where we have given these doctors a fair break. We have seldom told them the whole truth nor have we followed their advice. Unwilling to be honest with these sympathetic doctors, we were honest with no one else. Small wonder many in the medical profession have a low opinion of alcoholics and their chance for recovery!

We must be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world. Rightly and naturally, we think well before we choose the person or persons with whom to take this intimate and confidential step. Those of us belonging to a religious denomination which requires confession must, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty it is to receive it. Though we have no religious connection, we may still do well to talk with someone ordained by an established religion. We often find such a person quick to see and understand our problem. Of course, we sometimes encounter people who do not understand alcoholics.

If we cannot or would rather not do this, we search our acquaintance for a close-mouthed, understanding friend. Perhaps our doctor or psychologist will be the person. It may be one of our own family, but we cannot disclose anything to our [partners](#) or our parents which will hurt them and make them unhappy. We have no right to save our own skin at another person's expense. Such parts of our story we tell to someone who will understand, yet be unaffected. The rule is we must be hard on ourself, but always considerate of others.

Notwithstanding the great necessity for discussing ourselves with someone, it may be one is so situated that there is no suitable person available. If that is so, this step may be postponed, only, however, if we hold ourselves in complete readiness to go through with it at the first opportunity. We say this because we are very anxious that we talk to the right person. It is important that [they](#) be able to keep a confidence; that [they](#) fully understand and approve what we are driving at; that [they](#) will not try to change our plan. But we must not use this as a mere excuse to postpone.

When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time. We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk. We explain to our partner what we are about to do and why we have to do it. **They** should realize that we are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached in this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by our confidence.

We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our **higher power**. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the “Broad Highway,” walking hand in hand with the **spirit of the universe**.

Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thanked **our higher power** from the bottom of our heart that we know **it** better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free **person** at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimped on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand?

If we can answer to our satisfaction, we then look at Step Six. We have emphasized willingness as being indispensable. Are we now ready to let **our higher power help us let go of these traits and behaviors?** Can **we turn them over**—every one? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask **our higher power** to help us be willing.

When ready, we say something like this: “**Higher power**, I am now willing that you should have all of me, **for better or worse**. I pray that you **relieve me of those faults** which stand in the way of my usefulness to you and my **community**. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do **my best**.” We have then completed *Step Seven*.

Now we need more action, without which we find that **our faith is fruitless**. Let’s look at *Steps Eight and Nine*. We have a list of all persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory. We subjected ourselves to a drastic self-appraisal. Now we go out to our **community** and repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves. If we haven’t the will to do this, we ask until it comes. Remember it was agreed at the beginning *we would go to any lengths for freedom from alcohol*.

Probably there are still some misgivings. As we look over the list of business acquaintances and friends we have hurt, we may feel diffident about going to some of them on a spiritual basis. Let us be reassured. To some people we need not, and probably should not emphasize the spiritual feature on our first approach. We might

prejudice them. At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order. But this is not an end in itself. Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to **our higher power** and the people about us. It is seldom wise to approach individuals, who still smart from our injustices to **them**, and announce that we have gone **spiritual**. In the prize ring, this would be called leading with the chin. Why lay ourselves open to being branded fanatics or religious bores? We may kill a future opportunity to carry a beneficial message. But **these people are** sure to be impressed with a sincere desire to set right the wrong. **They are** going to be more interested in a demonstration of good will than in our talk of spiritual discoveries.

We don't use this as an excuse for shying away from the subject of **higher power**. When it will serve any good purpose, we are willing to announce our convictions with tact and common sense. The question of how to approach **those we still resent** will arise. It may be **they** had done us more harm than we have done **them** and, though we may have acquired a better attitude toward **them**, we are still not too keen about admitting our faults. Nevertheless, with a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend, but we find it much more beneficial to us. We go to **these individuals** in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill feeling and expressing our regret.

Under no condition do we criticize such **people** or argue. Simply we tell **them** that we will never get over drinking until we have done our utmost to straighten out the past. We are there to sweep off our side

of the street, realizing that nothing worth while can be accomplished until we do so, never trying to tell **them** what **they** should do. **Their** faults are not discussed. We stick to our own. If our manner is calm, frank, and open, we will be gratified with the result.

In nine cases out of ten the unexpected happens. Sometimes the **people** we are calling upon admit **their** own faults, so feuds of years' standing melt away in an hour. Rarely do we fail to make satisfactory progress. Our former enemies sometimes praise what we are doing and wish us well. Occasionally, they will offer assistance. It should not matter, however, if some do throw us out of **their** offices. We have made our demonstration, done our part. It's water over the dam.

Most alcoholics owe money. We do not dodge our creditors. Telling them what we are trying to do, we make no bones about our drinking; they usually know it anyway, whether we think so or not. Nor are we afraid of disclosing our alcoholism on the theory it may cause financial harm. Approached in this way, the most ruthless creditor will sometimes surprise us. Arranging the best deal we can we let these people know we are sorry. Our drinking has made us slow to pay. We must lose our fear of creditors no matter how far we have to go, for we are liable to drink if we are afraid to face them.

Perhaps we have committed a criminal offense which might land us in jail if it were known to the authorities. We may be short in our accounts and unable to make good. We have already admitted this in confidence to another person, but we are sure we would be imprisoned or lose our job if it were known. Maybe it's only a petty offense such as padding the expense account. Most of us have done that sort of thing.

Maybe we are divorced, and have remarried but haven't kept up the alimony to our first partners. They are indignant about it, and have warrants out for our arrest. That's a common form of trouble too.

Although these reparations take innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding. Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything.

Usually, however, other people are involved. Therefore, we are not to be the hasty and foolish martyrs who would needlessly sacrifice others to save themselves from the alcoholic pit. A man\* we know had remarried. Because of resentment and drinking, he had not paid alimony to his first wife. She was furious. She went to court and got an order for his arrest. He had commenced our way of life, had secured a position, and was getting his head above water. It would have been impressive heroics if he had walked up to the Judge and said, "Here I am."

We thought he ought to be willing to do that if necessary, but if he were in jail he could provide nothing for either family. We suggested he write his first wife admitting his faults and asking forgiveness. He did, and also sent a small amount of money. He told her what he would try to do in the future. He said he was perfectly willing to go to jail if she insisted. She did not, and the whole situation has long since been adjusted.

\*The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.

Before taking drastic action which might implicate other people we secure their consent. If we have obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked [our higher power](#) to help and the drastic step is indicated we must not shrink.

This brings to mind a story about one\* of our friends. While drinking, he accepted a sum of money from a bitterly-hated business rival, giving him no receipt for it. He subsequently denied having received the money and used the incident as a basis for discrediting the man. He thus used his own wrong-doing as a means of destroying the reputation of another. In fact, his rival was ruined.

He felt that he had done a wrong he could not possibly make right. If he opened that old affair, he was afraid it would destroy the reputation of his partner, disgrace his family and take away his means of livelihood. What right had he to involve those dependent upon him? How could he possibly make a public statement exonerating his rival?

After consulting with his wife and partner he came to the conclusion that it was better to take those risks than to stand before his [higher power](#) guilty of such ruinous slander. He saw that he had to place the outcome in [the care of his higher power](#) or he would soon start drinking again, and all would be lost anyhow. He attended [a spiritual service](#) for the first time in many years. After the [service](#), he quietly got up and made an explanation. His action met widespread approval, and today he is one of the most trusted citizens of his town. This all happened years ago.

*\* The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.*

The chances are that we have domestic troubles. Perhaps we are mixed up with **romantic and/or sexual partners** in a fashion we wouldn't care to have advertised. We doubt if, in this respect, alcoholics are fundamentally much worse than other people. But drinking does complicate sex relations in the home. After a few years with an alcoholic, **partners** get worn out, resentful and uncommunicative. How could **they** be anything else? The **alcoholics** begin to feel lonely, sorry for **themselves**. **They** commence to look around in the night clubs, or their equivalent, for something besides liquor. Perhaps **they are** having affairs with **partners who "understand" better**. In fairness we must say that **they** may understand, but what are we going to do about a thing like that? **Alcoholics** so involved often feel very remorseful at times, especially if **they are committed** to loyal and courageous **partners** who **have** literally gone through hell for **them**.

Whatever the situation, we usually have to do something about it. If we are sure our **partners** do not know, should we tell **them**? Not always, we think. If **they** know in a general way that we have been wild, should we tell **them** in detail? Undoubtedly we should admit our fault. **They** may insist on knowing all the particulars. **They may** want to know who the **other person** is and where **that person** is. We feel we ought to say to **our partners** that we have no right to involve another person. We are sorry for what we have done and, **with our higher power's help**, it shall not be repeated. More than that we cannot do; we have no right to go further. Though there may be justifiable exceptions, and though we wish to lay down no rule of any sort, we have often found this the best course to take.

Our design for living is not a one-way street. It is as good for the **partner** as for the **alcoholic**. It is better, however, that one does not needlessly name a person upon whom **the partner** can vent **their painful emotions**.

Perhaps there are some cases where the utmost frankness is demanded. No outsider can appraise such an intimate situation. It may be that both will decide that the way of good sense and loving kindness is to let by-gones be by-gones. Each might pray about it, having the other one's happiness uppermost in mind. Keep it always in sight that we are dealing with **very intense and difficult emotions**—including jealousy. **Wisdom may indicate that a direct approach is not necessarily the best one.**

If we have no such complication, there is plenty we should do at home. Sometimes we hear alcoholics say that the only thing **they** need to do is to keep sober. Certainly **they** must keep sober, for there will be no **peace** if **they** don't. But **they are** yet a long way from making good to the **partner** or parents whom for years **they have** so shockingly treated. Passing all understanding is the patience **family members** have had with alcoholics. Had this not been so, many of us would have no homes today, would perhaps be dead.

**Alcoholics are** like tornados rearing **their** way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel **alcoholics are** unthinking when **they** say that sobriety is enough. **They are** like the farmers who came up out of **their** cyclone cellars to find **their** homes ruined. To **their partners**, **they** remarked, "Don't see anything the matter here. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?"

Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We must take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won't fill the bill at all. We ought to sit down with the family and frankly analyze the past as we now see it, being very careful not to criticize them. Their defects may be glaring, but the chances are that our own actions are partly responsible. So we clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that our **higher power** show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness and love.

The spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it. Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual principles we think we ought not to urge them. We should not talk incessantly to them about spiritual matters. They will change in time. Our behavior will convince them more than our words. We must remember that ten or twenty years of drunkenness would make a skeptic out of anyone.

There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could. Some people cannot be seen—we send them an honest letter. And there may be a valid reason for postponement in some cases. But we don't delay if it can be avoided. We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile or scraping. As **spiritually oriented** people we stand on our feet.

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity

and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that [our higher power](#) is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.

This thought brings us to *Step Ten*, which suggests we continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along. We vigorously commenced this way of living as we cleaned up the past. We have entered the world of the [spirit](#). Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime. Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask [our higher power to help us let them go](#). We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code.

And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone— even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. [Most of us](#) will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame.

We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. **Some of us** will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality—safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of **our higher power** into all of our activities. “How can I best **be of service? Help me align my will with my higher power.**” These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will.

Much has already been said about receiving strength, inspiration, and direction from **a power greater than ourselves**. If we have carefully followed directions, we have begun to sense the flow of **a new energy** into us. To some extent we have become **more conscious**. We have begun to develop this vital sixth sense. But we must go further and that means more action.

*Step Eleven* suggests prayer and meditation. We shouldn't be shy on this matter of prayer. Better **people** than we are using it constantly.

It works, if we have the proper attitude and work at it. It would be easy to be vague about this matter. Yet, we believe we can make some definite and valuable suggestions.

When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflections, for that would diminish our usefulness to others. After making our review we ask [our higher power's](#) forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken.

On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask [our higher power](#) to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives. Under these conditions we can employ our mental faculties with assurance. Our thought-life will be placed on a much higher plane when our thinking is cleared of wrong motives.

In thinking about our day we may face indecision. We may not be able to determine which course to take. Here we ask [our higher power](#) for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. We relax and take it easy. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right answers come after we have tried this for a while. What used to be the

hunch or the occasional inspiration gradually becomes a working part of the mind. Being still inexperienced and having just made conscious contact with [a power greater than ourselves](#), it is not probable that we are going to be inspired at all times. We might pay for this presumption in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless, we find that our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration. We come to rely upon it.

We usually conclude the period of meditation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems. We ask especially for freedom from self-will, and are careful to make no request for ourselves only. We may ask for ourselves, however, if others will be helped. We are careful never to pray for our own selfish ends. Many of us have wasted a lot of time doing that and it doesn't work. You can easily see why.

If circumstances warrant, we ask our [partners](#) or friends to join us in morning meditation. If we belong to a religious denomination which requires a definite morning devotion, we attend to that also. If not members of religious bodies, we sometimes select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the principles we have been discussing. There are many helpful books also. Suggestions about these may be obtained from [various spiritual resources outside of AA](#). Be quick to see where religious people are right. Make use of what they offer.

As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many

times each day “How can I align my will with my higher power?” We are then in much less danger of excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire so easily, for we are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves. It works—it really does. But this is not all. There is action and more action. *Without action, our faith is fruitless.* The next chapter is entirely devoted to *Step Twelve*.

## chapter 7

### WORKING WITH OTHERS

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail. Remember they are very ill.

Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a [community](#) grow up about you, to have a host of friends—this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives.

Perhaps you are not acquainted with any drinkers who want to recover. You can easily find some by asking a few doctors, [community leaders](#), or hospitals. They will be only too glad to assist you. Don't start out as an evangelist or reformer. Unfortunately a lot of prejudice exists. You will be handicapped if you arouse it. [Spiritual teachers](#) and doctors are competent and you can learn much from them if you wish, but it happens that because of your own drinking experience you can be uniquely useful to other alcoholics. So cooperate; never criticize. To be helpful is our only aim.

When you discover prospects for Alcoholics Anonymous, find out all you can about them. If they do not want to stop drinking, don't waste time trying to persuade them. You may spoil a later opportunity. This advice is given for their families also. They should be patient, realizing they are dealing with sick people.

If there is any indication that they wants to stop, have a good talk with the people most interested in them—usually a friend or family member. Get an idea of their behavior, their problems, their background, the seriousness of their condition, and their spiritual leanings. You need this information to put yourself in their place, to see how you would like them to approach you if the tables were turned.

Sometimes it is wise to wait till they go on a binge. The family may object to this, but unless they are in a dangerous physical condition, it is better to risk it. Don't deal with them when they are very drunk, unless they are ugly and the family needs your help. Wait for the end of the spree, or at least for a lucid interval. Then let their family or friends ask them if they want to quit for good and if they would go to any extremes to do so. If they say yes, then their attention should be drawn to you as a person who has recovered. You should be described to them as one of a community who, as part of their own recovery, try to help others and who will be glad to talk to them if they care to see you.

If they do not want to see you, never force yourself upon them. Neither should the family hysterically plead with them to do anything, nor should they tell them much about you. They should wait for the end of the alcoholics' next drinking bout. You might place this book where they can see it in the interval. Here no specific rule can be given. The family must decide these things. But urge them not to be over-anxious, for that might spoil matters.

Usually the family should not try to tell your story. When possible, avoid meeting **alcoholics** through **their** family. Approach through a doctor or an institution is a better bet. If your **alcoholics** need hospitalization, **they** should have it, but not forcibly unless **they are** violent. Let the doctors, if **they** will, tell **the alcoholics that they have** something in the way of a solution.

When your **prospects are** better, the doctor might suggest a visit from you. Though you have talked with the family, leave them out of the first discussion. Under these conditions your **prospects** will see **they are** under no pressure. **They** will feel **they** can deal with you without being nagged by **their** family. Call on **they** while **they are** still jittery. **They** may be more receptive when depressed.

See your **prospects** alone, if possible. At first engage in general conversation. After a while, turn the talk to some phase of drinking. Tell **them** enough about your drinking habits, symptoms, and experiences to encourage **them** to speak of **themselves**. If **they** wish to talk, let **them** do so. You will thus get a better idea of how you ought to proceed. If **they are** not communicative, give **them** a sketch of your drinking career up to the time you quit. But say nothing, for the moment, of how that was accomplished. If **they are** in a serious mood dwell on the troubles liquor had caused you, being careful not to moralize or lecture. If **their** mood is light, tell **them** humorous stories of your escapades. Get **them** to tell some of **theirs**.

When **they** see you know all about the drinking game, commence to describe yourself as an alcoholic. Tell **them** how baffled you were, how you finally learned that you were sick. Give **them** an account of the

struggles you made to stop. Show **them** the mental twist which leads to the first drink of a spree. We suggest you do this as we have done it in the chapter on alcoholism. If **they are** alcoholic, **they** will understand you at once. **They** will match your mental inconsistencies with some of **their** own.

If you are satisfied that **they are** real alcoholics, begin to dwell on the hopeless feature of the malady. Show **them**, from your own experience, how the queer mental condition surrounding that first drink prevents normal functioning of the will power. Don't, at this stage, refer to this book, unless **they** had seen it and wish to discuss it. And be careful not to brand **them** as alcoholics. Let **them** draw **their** own conclusions. If **they** stick to the idea that **they** can still control **their** drinking, tell **them** that possibly **they** can—if **they are** not too alcoholic. But insist that if **they are** severely afflicted, there may be little chance **they** can recover by **themselves**.

Continue to speak of alcoholism as an illness, a fatal malady. Talk about the conditions of body and mind which accompany it. Keep **their** attention focussed mainly on your personal experience. Explain that many are doomed who never realized their predicament. Doctors are rightly loath to tell alcoholic patients the whole story unless it will serve some good purpose. But you may talk to **them** about the hopelessness of alcoholism because you offer a solution. You will soon have your friends admitting **they have** many, if not all, of the traits of the alcoholic. If **their** own doctors **are** willing to tell **them** that **they are** alcoholic, so much the better. Even though your protégés may not have entirely admitted **their** condition, **they have** become very

curious to know how you got well. Let **them** ask you that question, if **they** will. *Tell **them** exactly what happened to you.* Stress the spiritual feature freely. If **they** be agnostic or atheist, make it emphatic that ***they** do not have to agree with your conception of a higher power.* **They** can choose any conception **they** like, provided it makes sense to **them**. *The main thing is that **they** be willing to believe in a power greater than **themselves** and that **they** live by spiritual principles.*

When dealing with such **people**, you had better use everyday language to describe spiritual principles. There is no use arousing any prejudice **they** may have against certain theological terms and conceptions about which **they** may already be confused. Don't raise such issues, no matter what your own convictions are.

Your prospects may belong to a religious denomination. **Their** spiritual education and training may be far superior to yours. In that case **they are** going to wonder how you can add anything to what **they** already know. But **they** will be curious to learn why **their** own convictions have not worked and why yours seem to work so well. **They** may be examples of the truth that faith alone is insufficient. To be vital, faith must be accompanied by self-sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action. Let **them** see that you are not there to instruct **them** in **spiritual matters**. Admit that **they** probably know more about it than you do, but call to **their** attention the fact that however deep **their** faith and knowledge, **they** could not have applied it or **they** would not drink. Perhaps your story will help **them** see where **they have** failed to practice the very precepts **they** know so well. We

represent no particular faith or denomination. We are dealing only with general principles common to most **spiritual paths**.

Outline the program of action, explaining how you made a self-appraisal, how you straightened out your past and why you are now endeavoring to be helpful to **them**. It is important for **them** to realize that your attempt to pass this on to **them** plays a vital part in your own recovery. Actually, **they** may be helping you more than you are helping **them**. Make it plain **they are** under no obligation to you, that you hope only that **they** will try to help other alcoholics when **they** escape **their** own difficulties. Suggest how important it is that **they** place the welfare of other people ahead of **their** own. Make it clear that **they are** not under pressure, that **they** needn't see you again if **they** don't want to. You should not be offended if **they** want to call it off, for **they have** helped you more than you have helped **them**. If your talk has been sane, quiet and full of human understanding, you have perhaps made friends. Maybe you have disturbed **them** about the question of alcoholism. This is all to the good. The more hopeless **they** feel, the better. **They** will be more likely to follow your suggestions.

Your candidates may give reasons why **they** need not follow all of the program. **They** may rebel at the thought of a drastic housecleaning which requires discussion with other people. Do not contradict such views. Tell **them** you once felt as **they** do, but you doubt whether you would have made much progress had you not taken action. On your first visit tell **them** about the **community** of Alcoholics Anonymous. If **they** show interest, lend **them** your copy of this book.

Unless your friends want to talk further about themselves, do not wear out your welcome. Give them a chance to think it over. If you do stay, let them steer the conversation in any direction they like. Sometimes new people are anxious to proceed at once, and you may be tempted to let them do so. This is sometimes a mistake. If they had trouble later, they may say you rushed them. You will be most successful with alcoholics if you do not exhibit any passion for crusade or reform. Never talk down to alcoholics from any moral or spiritual hilltop; simply lay out the kit of spiritual tools for their inspection. Show them how they worked with you. Offer them friendship and fellowship. Tell them that if they want to get well you will do anything to help.

If they are not interested in your solution, if they expect you to act only as a banker for their financial difficulties or a nurse for their sprees, you may have to drop them until they change their minds. This they may do after they get hurt some more.

If they are sincerely interested and want to see you again, ask them to read this book in the interval. After doing that, they must decide for themselves whether they want to go on. They should not be pushed or prodded by you, their family, or their friends. If they are to find a higher power, the desire must come from within.

If they think they can do the job in some other way, or prefer some other spiritual approach, encourage them to follow their own conscience. We have no monopoly on higher power; we merely have an approach that worked with us. But point out that we alcoholics have much in common and that you would like, in any case, to be friendly. Let it go at that.

Do not be discouraged if your prospect does not respond at once. Search out another alcoholic and try again. You are sure to find someone desperate enough to accept with eagerness what you offer. We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a **person** who cannot or will not work with you. If you leave such **people** alone, **they** may soon become convinced that **they** cannot recover by **themselves**. To spend too much time on any one situation is to deny some other alcoholic an opportunity to live and be happy. One\* of our **community** failed entirely with his first half dozen prospects. He often says that if he had continued to work on them, he might have deprived many others, who have since recovered, of their chance.

Suppose now you are making your second visit to **some prospects**. **They** **have** read this volume and say **they are** prepared to go through with the Twelve Steps of the program of recovery. Having had the experience yourself, you can give **them** much practical advice. Let **them** know you are available if **they** wish to make a decision and tell **their** stories, but do not insist upon it if **they** prefer to consult **other people**.

**They** may be broke and homeless. If **they are**, you might try to help **them** about getting a job, or give **them** a little financial assistance. But you should not deprive your family or creditors of money they should have. Perhaps you will want to take **alcoholics** into your home for a few days. But be sure you use discretion. Be certain **they** will be welcomed by **those who share your home**, and that **they are** not trying to impose upon you for money, connections, or shelter. Permit that and you only harm **them**. You will be making it possible for **them** to be insincere. You may be aiding in **their** destruction rather than **their** recovery.

*\* The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.*

Never avoid these responsibilities, but be sure you are doing the right thing if you assume them. Helping others is the foundation stone of your recovery. A kindly act once in a while isn't enough. You have to act the **helpful citizen** every day, if need be. It may mean the loss of many nights' sleep, great interference with your pleasures, interruptions to your business. It may mean sharing your money and your home, counseling frantic **friends** and **family members**, innumerable trips to police courts, sanitariums, hospitals, jails and asylums. Your telephone may jangle at any time of the day or night. Your **partners** may sometimes say **they are** neglected. **Drunks** may smash the furniture in your home, or burn a mattress. You may have to fight with **them** if **they are** violent. Sometimes you will have to meet doctors and administer sedatives under **their** direction. Another time you may have to send for the police or an ambulance. Occasionally you will have to meet such conditions.

We seldom allow **alcoholics** to live in our homes for long at a time. It is not good for **them**, and it sometimes creates serious complications in **families**.

Though **some alcoholics** do not respond, there is no reason why you should neglect **their families**. You should continue to be friendly to them. The family should be offered your way of life. Should they accept and practice spiritual principles, there is a much better chance that the **alcoholics** will recover. And even though **they** continue to drink, the family will find life more bearable.

For the type of alcoholic who is able and willing to get well, little charity, in the ordinary sense of the word, is needed or wanted. The ones who cry for money and shelter before conquering alcohol, are on the wrong track. Yet we do go to great extremes to provide each other with these very things, when such action is warranted. This may seem inconsistent, but we think it is not.

It is not the matter of giving that is the question, but when and how we give. That often makes the difference between failure and success. The minute we put our work on a service plane, the alcoholics commence to rely upon our assistance rather than upon that of their respective higher powers. They clamor for this or that, claiming they cannot master alcohol until their material needs are cared for. Nonsense. Some of us have taken very hard knocks to learn this truth: Job or no job—partner or no partner—we simply do not stop drinking so long as we place dependence upon other people ahead of dependence on our higher power.

Burn the idea into the consciousnesses of all alcoholics that they can get well regardless of anyone. The only condition is that they trust in a higher power and clean house.

Now, the domestic problem: There may be divorce, separation, or just strained relations. When your prospects have made such reparations as they can to their families, and have thoroughly explained to them the new principles by which they are living, they should proceed to put those principles into action at home. That is, if they are lucky enough to have homes. Though their families be at fault in many respects, they should not be concerned about that. They should concentrate on their own spiritual demonstration. Argument and fault-finding are to be avoided like the plague. In many homes

this is a difficult thing to do, but it must be done if any results are to be expected. If persisted in for a few months, the effect on a **person's** family is sure to be great. The most incompatible people discover they have a basis upon which they can meet. Little by little the family may see their own defects and admit them. These can then be discussed in an atmosphere of helpfulness and friendliness.

After they have seen tangible results, the family will perhaps want to go along. These things will come to pass naturally and in good time provided, however, the **alcoholics** continue to demonstrate that **they** can be sober, considerate, and helpful, regardless of what anyone says or does. Of course, we all fall much below this standard many times. But we must try to repair the damage immediately lest we pay the penalty by a spree.

If there be divorce or separation, there should be no undue haste for the couple to get together. The **alcoholics** should be sure of **their** recovery. The **partners** should fully understand **their** new way of life. If their old relationship is to be resumed it must be on a better basis, since the former did not work. This means a new attitude and spirit all around. Sometimes it is to the best interests of all concerned that a couple remain apart. Obviously, no rule can be laid down. Let the **alcoholics** continue **their** programs day by day. When the time for living together has come, it will be apparent to both parties.

Let no **alcoholics** say **they** cannot recover unless **they have their families** back. This just isn't so. In some cases the **partners** will never come back for one reason or another. Remind the prospects that **their** recovery is not dependent upon people. It is dependent upon **their**

relationship with a higher power. We have seen people get well whose families have not returned at all. We have seen others slip when the family came back too soon.

Both you and the new alcoholic must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things will happen. When we look back, we realize that the things which came to us when we put ourselves in the care of our higher power were better than anything we could have planned. Follow the guidance of a higher power and you will presently live in a new and wonderful world, no matter what your present circumstances!

When working with alcoholics and their families, you should take care not to participate in their quarrels. You may spoil your chance of being helpful if you do. But urge upon the families that the alcoholics have been very sick people and should be treated accordingly. You should warn against arousing resentment or jealousy. You should point out that their faults are not going to disappear overnight. Show them that the alcoholics have entered upon a period of growth. Ask them to remember, when they are impatient, the blessed fact of their loved ones' sobriety.

If you have been successful in solving your own domestic problems, tell the newcomer's family how that was accomplished. In this way you can set them on the right track without becoming critical of them. The story of how you and your family settled your difficulties is worth any amount of criticism.

Assuming we are spiritually fit, we can do all sorts of things alcoholics are not supposed to do. People have said we must not go where

liquor is served; we must not have it in our homes; we must shun friends who drink; we must avoid **movies** which show drinking scenes; we must not go into bars; our friends must hide their bottles if we go to their houses; we mustn't think or be reminded about alcohol at all. Our experience shows that this is not necessarily so.

We meet these conditions every day. **Alcoholics** who cannot meet them still **have** alcoholic minds; there is something the matter with **their** spiritual status. **Their** only chance for sobriety would be some place like the Greenland Ice Cap, and even there an Eskimo might turn up with a bottle of scotch and ruin everything! Ask any **family members** who **have** sent **their loved ones** to distant places on the theory **they** would escape the alcohol problem.

In our belief any scheme of combating alcoholism which proposes to shield the sick **person** from temptation is doomed to failure. If alcoholics **try** to shield **themselves** **they** may succeed for a time, but **they** usually wind up with bigger explosions than ever. We have tried these methods. These attempts to do the impossible have always failed.

So our rule is not to avoid a place where there is drinking, *if we have a legitimate reason for being there*. That includes bars, nightclubs, dances, receptions, weddings, even plain ordinary parties. To a person who has had experience with an alcoholic, this may seem like tempting Providence, but it isn't.

You will note that we made an important qualification. Therefore, ask yourself on each occasion, "Have I any good social, business, or personal reason for going to this place? Or am I expecting to steal a little vicarious pleasure from the atmosphere of such places?" If you

answer these questions satisfactorily, you need have no apprehension. Go or stay away, whichever seems best. But be sure you are on solid spiritual ground before you start and that your motive in going is thoroughly good. Do not think of what you will get out of the occasion. Think of what you can bring to it. But if you are shaky, you had better work with another alcoholic instead!

Why sit with a long face in places where there is drinking, sighing about the good old days. If it is a happy occasion, try to increase the pleasure of those there; if a business occasion, go and attend to your business enthusiastically. If you are with a person who wants to eat in a bar, by all means go along. Let your friends know they are not to change their habits on your account. At a proper time and place explain to all your friends why alcohol disagrees with you. If you do this thoroughly, few people will ask you to drink. While you were drinking, you were withdrawing from life little by little. Now you are getting back into the social life of this world. Don't start to withdraw again just because your friends drink liquor.

Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful. You should not hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth on such an errand. Keep on the firing line of life with these motives and [rely upon your higher power for guidance](#).

Many of us keep liquor in our homes. We often need it to carry green recruits through a severe hangover. Some of us still serve it to our friends provided they are not alcoholic. But some of us think we should not serve liquor to anyone. We never argue this question. We feel that each family, in the light of their own circumstances, ought to decide for themselves.

We are careful never to show intolerance or hatred of drinking as an institution. Experience shows that such an attitude is not helpful to anyone. New alcoholics look for this spirit among us and are immensely relieved when they find we are not witch-burners. A spirit of intolerance might repel alcoholics whose lives could have been saved, had it not been for such stupidity. We would not even do the cause of temperate drinking any good, for not one drinker in a thousand likes to be told anything about alcohol by one who hates it.

Some day we hope that Alcoholics Anonymous will help the public to a better realization of the gravity of the alcoholic problem, but we shall be of little use if our attitude is one of bitterness or hostility. Drinkers will not stand for it.

*After all, our problems were of our own making. Bottles were only a symbol. Besides, we have stopped fighting anybody or anything. We have to!*

## chapter 8

# TO PARTNERS OF ALCOHOLICS

FOR EVERY ALCOHOLIC who drinks, others are involved— the **partners** who **live** in fear of the next debauch; the **parents** who see their **child** wasting away.

Among us are **partners**, relatives and friends whose problem has been solved, as well as some who have not yet found a happy solution. We want the **partners** of Alcoholics Anonymous to address the **partners** of **those** who drink too much. What they say will apply to nearly everyone bound by ties of blood or affection to an alcoholic.

As **partners** of Alcoholics Anonymous, we would like you to feel that we understand as perhaps few can. We want to analyze mistakes we have made. We want to leave you with the feeling that no situation is too difficult and no unhappiness too great to be overcome.

We have traveled a rocky road, there is no mistake about that. We have had long rendezvous with hurt pride, frustration, self-pity, misunderstanding and fear. These are not pleasant companions. We have

been driven to maudlin sympathy, to bitter resentment. Some of us veered from extreme to extreme, ever hoping that one day our loved ones would be themselves once more.

Our loyalty and the desire that our [partners](#) hold up their heads and be like [their peers](#) have begotten all sorts of predicaments. We have been unselfish and self-sacrificing. We have told innumerable lies to protect our pride and our [partners'](#) reputations. We have prayed, we have begged, we have been patient. We have struck out viciously. We have run away. We have been hysterical. We have been terror stricken. We have sought sympathy. We have had retaliatory love affairs with other [people](#).

Our homes have been battle-grounds many an evening. In the morning we have kissed and made up. Our friends have counseled chucking the [alcoholics](#) and we have done so with finality, only to be back in a little while hoping, always hoping. Our [partners](#) have sworn great solemn oaths that they were through drinking forever. We have believed them when no one else could or would. Then, in days, weeks, or months, a fresh outburst.

We seldom had friends at our homes, never knowing how or when the [alcoholics](#) of the house would appear. We could make few social engagements. We came to live almost alone. When we were invited out, our [partners](#) sneaked so many drinks that they spoiled the occasion. If, on the other hand, they took nothing, their self-pity made them killjoys.

There was rarely financial security in the case of our partners. Positions were always in jeopardy or gone.

Sometimes there were other lovers. How heartbreaking was this discovery; how cruel to be told they understood our partner as we did not!

The bill collectors, the sheriffs, the angry taxi driver, the policemen, the bums, the pals they sometimes brought home—our alcoholics thought we were so inhospitable. “Joykiller, nag, wet blanket”—that’s what they said. Next day they would be themselves again and we would forgive and try to forget.

We have tried to hold the love of our children for their alcoholic parent. We have told small tots that their parent was sick, which was much nearer the truth than we realized. Some of these alcoholics became violent. In the midst of such pandemonium they may have rushed out threatening to live with the other lover forever. In desperation, we have even got tight ourselves—the drunk to end all drunks. The unexpected result was that our partners seemed to like it.

Perhaps at this point we got a divorce and took the children elsewhere. Then we were severely criticized for desertion. Usually we did not leave. We stayed on and on, despite worsening conditions for our families.

We began to ask medical advice as the sprees got closer together. The alarming physical and mental symptoms, the deepening pall of remorse, depression and inferiority that settled down on our loved

ones—these things terrified and distracted us. As animals on a treadmill, we have patiently and wearily climbed, falling back in exhaustion after each futile effort to reach solid ground. Most of us have entered the final stage with its commitment to health resorts, sanitariums, hospitals, and jails. Sometimes there were screaming delirium and insanity. Death was often near.

Under these conditions we naturally made mistakes. Some of them rose out of ignorance of alcoholism. Sometimes we sensed dimly that we were dealing with sick **individuals**. Had we fully understood the nature of the alcoholic illness, we might have behaved differently.

How could **people** who loved their **families** be so unthinking, so callous, so cruel? There could be no love in such persons, we thought. And just as we were being convinced of their heartlessness, they would surprise us with fresh resolves and new attentions. For a while they would be their old sweet selves, only to dash the new structure of affection to pieces once more. Asked why they commenced to drink again, they would reply with some silly excuse, or none. If was so baffling, so heartbreaking. Could we have been so mistaken in the **partner we chose**? When drinking, they were strangers. Sometimes they were so inaccessible that it seemed as though a great wall had been built around them.

And even if they did not love their families, how could they be so blind about themselves? What had become of their judgement, their common sense, their will power? Why could they not see that drink meant ruin to them? Why was it, when these dangers were pointed out that they agreed, and then got drunk again immediately?

These are some of the questions which race through the mind of many who have alcoholic loved ones. We hope this book has answered some of them. Perhaps your alcoholics have been living in that strange world of alcoholism where everything is distorted and exaggerated. You can see that they really do love you with their better selves. Of course, there is such a thing as incompatibility, but in nearly every instance the alcoholic only seems to be unloving and inconsiderate; it is usually because they are warped and sickened that they say and do these appalling things. Today most of our alcoholics are better partners and family members than ever before.

Try not to condemn your alcoholic. They are very sick, and likely won't respond to reason. Treat them, when you can, as though they had pneumonia. When they anger you, remember that they are very ill.

There is an important exception to the foregoing. We realize some people are thoroughly bad-intentioned, that no amount of patience will make any difference. An alcoholic of this temperament may be quick to use this chapter against you. Don't let them get away with it. If you are positive they are of this type you may feel you had better leave. Is it right to let them ruin your life and the lives of others? Especially when they had before them a way to stop their drinking and abuse.

The problem with which you struggle usually falls within one of four categories:

*One:* Your **loved ones** may be only heavy drinkers. **Their** drinking may be constant or it may be heavy only on certain occasions. Perhaps **they** spend too much money for liquor. It may be slowing **them** up mentally and physically, but **they** do not see it. Sometimes **they are** a source of embarrassment to you and **their** friends. **They are** positive **they** can handle **their** liquor, that it does **them** no harm, that drinking is necessary in **their** businesses. **They** would probably be insulted if **they** were called alcoholics. This world is full of people like **them**. Some will moderate or stop altogether, and some will not. Of those who keep on, a good number will become true alcoholics after a while.

*Two:* Your **loved ones are** showing lack of control, for **they are** unable to stay on the water wagon even when **they** want to. **They** often get entirely out of hand when drinking. **They** admit this is true, but **are** positive that **they** will do better. **They have** begun to try, with or without your cooperation, various means of moderating or staying dry. Maybe **they are** beginning to lose **their** friends. **Their work** may suffer somewhat. **They are** worried at times, and **are** becoming aware that **they** cannot drink like other people. **They** sometimes drink in the morning and through the day also, to hold **their** nervousness in check. **They are** remorseful after serious drinking bouts and tell you **they** want to stop. But when **they** get over the **sprees**, **they** begin to think once more how **they** can drink moderately next time. We think **these people are** in danger. These are the earmarks of a real alcoholic. Perhaps **they** can still tend to business fairly well. **They have** by no means ruined everything. As we say among ourselves, “*They want to want to stop.*”

*Three:* These loved ones have gone much further than those in group number two. Though once like group number two they became worse. Their friends have slipped away, their homes are near-wrecks and they cannot hold positions. Maybe doctors have been called in, and the weary rounds of sanitariums and hospitals have begun. They admit they cannot drink like other people, but do not see why. They cling to the notion that they will yet find a way to do so. They may have come to the point where they desperately want to stop but cannot. Their cases present additional questions which we shall try to answer for you. You can be quite hopeful of a situation like this.

*Four:* You may have loved ones of whom you completely despair. They have been placed in one institution after another. They are violent, or appear definitely insane when drunk. Sometimes they drink on the way home from the hospital. Perhaps they have had delirium tremens. Doctors may shake their heads and advise you to have them committed. Maybe you have already been obliged to put them away. This picture may not be as dark as it looks. Many of our love ones were just as far gone. Yet they got well.

Let's now go back to the loved ones in group number one. Oddly enough, they are often difficult to deal with. They enjoy drinking. It stirs their imagination. Their friends feel closer over a highball. Perhaps you enjoy drinking with them yourself when they don't go too far. You have passed happy evenings together chatting and drinking before your fire. Perhaps you both like parties which would be dull without liquor. We have enjoyed such evenings ourselves; we had a good time. We know all about liquor as a social lubricant. Some, but not all of us, think it has its advantages when reasonably used.

Be determined that your **loved one's** drinking is not going to spoil your relations with your **other family members** or your friends. They need your companionship and your help. It is possible to have a full and useful life, though your **alcoholic** continues to drink. We know **people** who are unafraid, even happy under these conditions. Do not set your heart on reforming your **alcoholic**. You may be unable to do so, no matter how hard you try.

We know these suggestions are sometimes difficult to follow, but you will save many a heartbreak if you can succeed in observing them. This may lay the groundwork for a friendly talk about **their** alcoholic problem. Let **them** see that you want to be helpful rather than critical.

When discussions do arise, you might suggest **they** read this book or at least the chapter on alcoholism. Tell **them** you have been worried. You think **they** ought to know the subject better, as everyone should have a clear understanding of the risk **they** take if **they** drink too much. Show **them** you have confidence in **them**. **Emphasize** that you want **them** to take care of **their** health. Thus you may succeed in interesting **them** in alcoholism.

**They** probably **have** several alcoholics among **their** own acquaintances. You might suggest that you both take an interest in them. Drinkers like to help other drinkers. Your **loved one** may be willing to talk to one of them.

If this kind of approach does not catch your **loved ones'** interest, it may be best to drop the subject, but after a friendly talk **they** will **often** revive the topic **themselves**. This may take patient waiting, but it will be worth it. Meanwhile you might try to help the **friends and/or family members** of other serious drinkers.

Suppose, however, that your **loved ones** fit the description of **group** number two. The same principles which apply to **group** number one should be practiced. But after **their** next binge, ask **them** if **they** would really like to get over drinking for good. Do not ask that **they** do it for you or anyone else. Just would **they** like to?

The chances are **they** would. Show **them** your copy of this book and tell **them** what you have found out about alcoholism. Show **them** that as alcoholics, the writers of the book understand. Tell **them** some of the interesting stories you have read. If you think **they** will be shy of a spiritual remedy, ask **them** to look at the chapter on alcoholism. Then perhaps **they** will be interested enough to continue.

If **they are** enthusiastic your **support** will mean a great deal. If **they are** lukewarm or think **they are** not alcoholics, we suggest you leave **them** alone. Avoid urging **them** to follow our program. The seed has been planted in **their** minds. **They** know that thousands of **people**, much like **themselves**, have recovered. But don't remind **them** of this after **they have** been drinking. Sooner or later, you are likely to find **them** reading the book once more. Wait until repeated stumbling convinces **them they** must act, for the more you hurry **them** the longer **their** recovery may be delayed.

If you have a number three **loved one**, you may be in luck. Being certain **they** want to stop, you can go to **them** with this volume as though you had struck oil. **They** may not share your enthusiasm, but **they are** practically sure to read the book and **they** may go for the program at once. If **they** do not, you will probably not have long to wait.

You would suppose that **those** in the fourth classification would be quite hopeless, but that is not so. Many of Alcoholics Anonymous were like that. Everybody had given them up. Defeat seemed certain. Yet often such **people** had spectacular and powerful recoveries.

There are exceptions. Some **people** have been so impaired by alcohol that they cannot stop. Sometimes there are cases where alcoholism is complicated by other disorders. A good doctor or psychiatrist can tell you whether these complications are serious. In any event, try to have your **loved one** read this book. **Their** reactions may be enthusiastic. If **they are** already committed to an institution, but can convince you and your doctor that **they** mean business, give **them** a chance to try our method, unless the doctor thinks **their** mental conditions too abnormal or dangerous. We make this recommendation with some confidence. For years we have been working with alcoholics committed to institutions. Since this book was first published, A.A. has released thousands of alcoholics from asylums and hospitals of every kind. The majority have never returned.

You may have the reverse situation on your hands. Perhaps you have **loved ones** who **are** at large, but who should be committed. Some **people** cannot or will not **recover**. When they become too dangerous, we think the kind thing is to lock them up, but of course a good doctor should always be consulted.

But sometimes you must start life anew. We know **partners of alcoholics** who have done it. If such **people** adopt a spiritual way of life their road will be smoother.

A close relationship with alcoholics may bring on fear, isolation, shame, and embarrassment for you. We find that most of this embarrassment is unnecessary. While you need not discuss your alcoholics at length, you can quietly let your friends know the nature of their illness. When you have carefully explained to such people that your loved ones are sick, you will have created a new atmosphere. Barriers which may have sprung up between you and your friends will disappear with the growth of sympathetic understanding. You need no longer be self-conscious or feel that you must apologize. Your new courage, good nature and lack of self-consciousness will do wonders for you socially.

The same principle applies in dealing with the children. Use your energies to promote a better understanding all around. Then that terrible tension which grips the home of every problem drinker will be lessened.

Perhaps you have felt obliged to cover for your alcoholic loved ones. Avoid answering on their behalf as much as you can. Whenever possible, let the alcoholic explain. Your desire to protect your loved ones should not cause you to lie to people when they have a right to know where they are and what they are doing. Discuss this with them when they are sober.

There is another paralyzing fear. You may be afraid your **partners** will lose **their jobs**; you are thinking of the **challenges** which **could** befall you and the **family**. This experience may come to you. Or you may already have had it several times. Time after time, this apparent calamity has been a boon to us, for it opened up a path which led to the discovery of **a higher power**.

We have elsewhere remarked how much better life is when lived on a spiritual plane. If **a higher power** can solve the age-old riddle of alcoholism, **it** can solve your problems too. We **partners** found that, like everybody else, we were afflicted with pride, self-pity, vanity and all the things which go to make up the self-centered person; and we were not above selfishness or dishonesty. As our **alcoholics** began to apply spiritual principals in their lives, we began to see the desirability of doing so too.

At first, some of us did not believe we needed this help. We thought, on the whole, we were pretty good **people**, capable of being nicer if our **alcoholics** stopped drinking. But it was a silly idea that we were too good to need **a higher power**. Now we try to put spiritual principles to work in every department of our lives. When we do that, we find it solves our problems too; the ensuing lack of fear, worry and hurt feelings is a wonderful thing. We urge you to try our program,

for nothing will be so helpful to your **alcoholics** as the radically changed attitude toward **them** which **a higher power** will show you how to have. Go along with your **alcoholic** if you possibly can.

If you and your **alcoholic** find a solution for the pressing problem of drink you are, of course, going to be very happy. But all problems will not be solved at once. Seed had started to sprout in a new soil, but growth has only begun. In spite of your new-found happiness, there will be ups and downs. Many of the old problems will still be with you. This is as it should be.

The faith and sincerity of both you and your **alcoholic** will be put to the test. These work-outs should be regarded as part of your education, for thus you will be learning to live. You will make mistakes, but if you are in earnest they will not drag you down. Instead, you will capitalize them. A better way of life will emerge when they are overcome.

Some of the snags you will encounter are irritation, hurt feelings and resentment. Your **alcoholic** will sometimes be unreasonable and you will want to criticize. Starting from a speck on the domestic horizon, great thunderclouds of dispute may gather. These family dissensions are very dangerous. Never forget that resentment is a deadly hazard to an alcoholic. We do not mean that you have to agree with your **partner** whenever there is an honest difference of opinion. Just **remember to avoid mean-spirited words, touch base with your higher power, and speak from a place of love whenever possible.**

You and your **partner may** find that you can dispose of serious problems easier than you can the trivial ones. Next time you and **your partner** have a heated discussion, no matter what the subject, it should be the privilege of either to **pause when aggitated**, say, "This is getting serious. I'm sorry I got disturbed. Let's talk about it later." If your **partners are** trying to live on a spiritual basis, **they** will also be doing everything in **their** power to avoid disagreement or contention.

Your **alcoholics** know **they** owe you more than sobriety. **They** want to make good. Yet you must not expect too much. **Their** ways of thinking and doing are the habits of years. Patience, tolerance, understanding and love are the watchwords. Show **them** these things in yourself and they will be reflected back to you from **them**. Live and let live is the rule. If you both show a willingness to remedy your own defects, there will be little need to criticize each other.

We **partners of alcoholics** carry with us a picture of the ideal **partner**, the sort of **person** we would like our **partners** to be. It is the most natural thing in the world, once **their** liquor problem is solved, to feel that **they** will now measure up to **those** cherished visions. The chances are **they** will not for, like yourself, **they are** just beginning **their** development. Be patient.

Another feeling we are very likely to entertain is one of resentment that love and loyalty could not cure our **partners** of alcoholism. We **may** not like the thought that the contents of a book or the work of another alcoholic has accomplished in a few weeks that for which we struggle for years. At such moments we forget that alcoholism is an illness over which we could not possibly have had any power. Your

alcoholic may say it was your devotion and care which brought them to the point where they could have a spiritual experience. Without you they would have gone to pieces long ago. When resentful thoughts come, try to pause and remember that for which you are grateful. After all, your family is reunited, alcohol is no longer a problem and you and your partner are working together toward an undreamed-of future.

Still another difficulty is that you may become jealous of the attention they bestow on other people, especially alcoholics. You have been starving for their companionship, yet they spend long hours helping other alcoholics and their families. The fact is that they should work with other people to maintain their own sobriety. We suggest that you direct some of your thought to the loved ones of your partners' new alcoholic friends. They need the counsel and love of a person who has gone through what you have.

It is probably true that you and your partner have been living too much alone, for drinking many times isolates the partner of an alcoholic. Therefore, you probably need fresh interests and a great cause to live for as much as your alcoholic. If you show compassion and patience, you and your partner can strike a healthy balance. Both of

you will awaken to a new sense of responsibility for others. You, as well as your **partner**, ought to think of what you can put into life instead of how much you can take out. Inevitably your lives will be fuller for doing so. You will lose the old life to find one much better.

Perhaps your **partners** will make a fair start on the new basis, but just as things are going beautifully **they** dismay you by coming home drunk. If you are satisfied **they** really want to **stop** drinking, you need not be alarmed. Though it is infinitely better that **they** have no **relapses** at all, as has been true with many of our **members**, it is by no means a bad thing in some cases. Your **partners** will **hopefully** see at once that **they** must redouble **their** spiritual activities if **they** expect to survive.

We never, never try to arrange **our partners' lives** so as to shield **them** from temptation. The slightest disposition on your part to guide **their** appointments or affairs so **they** will not be tempted will be noticed. Make **them** feel absolutely free to come and go as **they** like. This is important. If **they** get drunk, don't blame yourself. **It is not your job to fix your partners' alcoholism. They need conscious contact with their higher powers.** If **they are disconnected**, it had better be found out right away. Then you and your **partner** can get right down to fundamentals. If a repetition is to be prevented, place the problem, along with everything else, in **the care of your higher power.**

We realize that we have been giving you much direction and advice. We may have seemed to lecture. If that is so we are sorry, for we ourselves don't always care for people who lecture us. But what we have related is based upon experience, some of it painful. We had to learn these things the hard way. That is why we are anxious that you understand, and that you avoid these unnecessary difficulties.\*

So to you out there who may soon be with us—we [wish you well](#).

\*The fellowship of Al-Anon was formed in 1951, after this chapter was [initially](#) written. Though it is entirely separate from Alcoholics Anonymous, it uses the general principles of the A.A. program as a guide for [partners](#), relatives, friends, and others close to alcoholics.

## chapter 9

### THE FAMILY AFTERWARD

OUR FAMILIES have suggested certain attitudes partners may take with their alcoholics who are recovering. Perhaps they created the impression that the alcoholics are to be wrapped in cotton wool and placed on pedestals. Successful readjustment means the opposite. All members of the family should meet upon the common ground of tolerance, understanding and love. This involves a process of deflation. The alcoholics and their loved ones are likely to each have their own fixed ideas about the family's attitude towards themselves. They are interested in having their wishes respected. We find the more one member of the family demands that the others concede, the more resentful the others become. This makes for discord and unhappiness.

And why? Is it not because each wants to play the lead? Are they not trying to arrange the family show to their own liking? Are they not unconsciously trying to see what they can take from the family life rather than give?

Cessation of drinking is but the first step away from a highly strained, abnormal condition. A doctor said to us, "Years of living with an alcoholic is almost sure to make anyone neurotic. The entire family is, to some extent, ill." Let families realize, as they start their journey, that

all will not be fair weather. Each in turn may be footsore and may straggle. There will be alluring shortcuts and by-paths down which they may wander and lose their way.

Suppose we tell you some of the obstacles a family will meet; suppose we suggest how they may be avoided—even converted to good use for others. The family of an alcoholic longs for the return of happiness and security. They remember when [the alcoholic](#) was romantic, thoughtful and successful. Today's life is measured against that of other years and, when it falls short, the family may be unhappy.

Family confidence in [the alcoholic](#) is rising high. The good old days will soon be back, they think. Sometimes they demand that [the alcoholic](#) bring them back instantly! [A higher power](#), they believe, almost owes this recompense on a long overdue account. But the [alcoholic](#) has spent years in pulling down the structures of business, romance, friendship, health—these things are now ruined or damaged. It will take time to clear away the wreck. Though old buildings will eventually be replaced by finer ones, the new structures will take years to complete.

[These alcoholics](#) know [they are](#) to blame; it may take [them](#) many seasons of hard work to be restored financially [and otherwise](#), but [they](#) shouldn't be reproached. Perhaps [they](#) will never have much money again. But the wise [families](#) will admire [them](#) for what [they are](#) trying to be, rather than for what [they are](#) trying to get.

Now and then the family will be plagued by specters from the past, for the drinking career of almost every alcoholic has been marked by escapades, funny, humiliating, shameful or tragic. The first impulse will be to bury these skeletons in a dark closet and padlock the door.

The family may be possessed by the idea that future happiness can be based only upon forgetfulness of the past. We think that such a view is self-centered and in direct conflict with the new way of living.

Henry Ford once made a wise remark to the effect that experience is the thing of supreme value in life. That is true only if one is willing to turn the past to good account. We grow by our willingness to face and rectify errors and convert them into assets. [The alcoholic's past can prove a valuable asset to the family.](#)

This painful past may be of infinite value to other families still struggling with their problem. We think each family which has been relieved owes something to those who have not, and when the occasion requires, each member of it should be only too willing to bring former mistakes, no matter how grievous, out of their hiding places. Showing others who suffer how we were given help is the very thing which makes life seem so worth while to us now. Cling to the thought that, in [the care of a higher power](#), the dark past is the greatest possession you have—the key to life and happiness for others. With it you can avert death and misery for them.

It is possible to dig up past misdeeds so they become a blight, a veritable plague. For example, we know of situations in which [alcoholics and/or their partners](#) have had love affairs. In the first flush of spiritual experience they forgave each other and drew closer together. The miracle of reconciliation was at hand. Then, under one provocation or another, the aggrieved one would unearth the old affair and angrily cast its ashes about. A few of us have had these growing

pains and they hurt a great deal. **Couples** have sometimes been obliged to separate for a time until new perspective, new victory over hurt pride could be won. In most cases, the alcoholic survived this ordeal without relapse, but not always. So we think that unless some good and useful purpose is to be served, past occurrences should not be discussed.

We families of Alcoholics Anonymous keep few skeletons in the closet. Everyone knows about the others' alcoholic troubles. This is a condition which, in ordinary life, would produce untold grief; there might be scandalous gossip, laughter at the expense of other people, and a tendency to take advantage of intimate information. Among us, these are rare occurrences. We do talk about each other a great deal, but we almost invariably temper such talk by a spirit of love and tolerance.

Another principle we observe carefully is that we do not relate intimate experiences of another person unless we are sure **the other person** would approve. We find it better, when possible, to stick to our own stories. **People** may criticize or laugh at **themselves** and it will affect others favorably, but criticism or ridicule coming from another often produces the contrary effect. Members of a family should watch such matters carefully, for one careless, inconsiderate remark has been known to raise **trouble**. We alcoholics are sensitive people, **and can be overly sensitive early on**. It takes some of us a long time to outgrow **oversensitivity**.

Many alcoholics are enthusiasts. They run to extremes. At the beginning of recovery **alcoholics** will take, as a rule, one of two directions. **They** may either plunge into frantic attempts to get on **their** feet in

business, or **they** may be so enthralled by **their** new lives that **they** talk or think of little else. In either case certain family problems will arise. With these we have had experience galore.

We think it dangerous if **they** rush headlong at **their** economic problems. The family will be affected also, pleasantly at first, as they feel their money troubles are about to be solved, then not so pleasantly as they **may** find themselves neglected. **Your alcoholics** may be tired or preoccupied. **They** may **show irritation when confronted with their shortcomings**. If not irritable, **they** may seem dull and boring, not **pleasant** and affectionate as the family would like **them** to be. **Partners may feel they need more attention**. The **family members** are all disappointed, and often let **the alcoholic** feel it. Beginning with such complaints, a barrier arises. **The newly recovering family members are** straining every nerve to make up for lost time. **They are** striving to recover fortune and reputation and feel **they are** doing well.

Sometimes **their family members** don't think so. Having been neglected and misused in the past, they think **they are owed** more than they are getting. They want **more attention**. They expect **the alcoholics** to give them the nice times they used to have before **they** drank so much, and to show contrition for what the **family** suffered. But **the alcoholics may not** give freely of **themselves**. Resentment grows. **They may** become still less communicative. Sometimes **they** explode over a trifle. The family is mystified. They criticize, pointing out how **the alcoholics are** falling down on **their** spiritual programs.

This sort of thing can be avoided. **All family members** are mistaken, though each side may have some justification. It is of little use to argue and only makes the impasse worse. The family must realize

that **their alcoholic family members**, though marvelously improved, **are** still convalescing. The **family** should be thankful **they are** sober and able to be of this world once more. Let them **acknowledge their** progress. Let them remember that **the alcoholics'** drinking wrought all kinds of damage that may take long to repair. If they sense these things, they will not take so seriously periods of crankiness, depression, or apathy, which will **improve** when there is tolerance, love, and spiritual understanding.

The **alcoholics** ought to remember that **they are** mainly to blame for what befell **their** homes. **They can** scarcely square the accounts in **their** lifetimes. But **they** must see the danger of over-concentration on financial success. Although financial recovery is on the way for many of us, we found we could not place money first. For us, material well-being always followed spiritual progress; it never preceded.

Since the home has suffered more than anything else, it is well that **alcoholics** exert **themselves** there. **They are** not likely to get far in any direction if **they** fail to show unselfishness and love under **their** own rooves.

As members of a resentful family begins to see **their own** shortcomings and admit them to the others, **they** lay a basis for helpful discussion. These family talks will be constructive if they can be carried on without heated argument, self-pity, self-justification or resentful criticism. Little by little, **family members will understand one another's needs**. Giving, rather than getting, will become the guiding principle.

Assume on the other hand that **the alcoholics have**, at the outset, a stirring spiritual experience. Overnight, as it were, **they are** different **people**. **They** becomes **spiritual** enthusiasts. **They are** unable to focus on anything else. As soon as **their** sobriety begins to be taken as a matter of course, the family may look at their strange new **family members** with apprehension, then with irritation. There is talk about spiritual matters morning, noon and night. **The alcoholics** may demand that the family find **similar spirituality** in a hurry, or exhibit amazing indifference to them and say **they are** above worldly considerations.

When **alcoholics** take this tack, the **families** may react unfavorably. They may be jealous of a “**higher power**” who has stolen **the** affections **of their alcoholic family members**. While grateful that **they** drink no more, they may not like the idea that **a higher power** has accomplished the miracle where they failed. They often forget **the alcoholics were** beyond human aid. They may not see why their love and devotion did not straighten **the alcoholics** out. **These recovering family members are** not so spiritual after all, they say. If **they** mean to right **their** past wrongs, why all this concern for everyone in the world but **their families**? What about his talk that **a higher power** will take care of them? They suspect **their alcoholic** is a bit balmy!

**They are** not so unbalanced as **their loved ones** might think. Many of us have experienced **such** elation. We have indulged in spiritual intoxication. Like a gaunt prospector, belt drawn in over the last ounce of food, our pick struck gold. Joy at our release from a lifetime of

frustration knew no bounds. **The alcoholics feel they have** struck something better than gold. For a time **they** may try to hug the new treasure to **themselves**. **They** may not see at once that **they have** barely scratched a limitless lode which will pay dividends only if **they** mine it for the rest of **their lives** and insist on giving away the entire product.

If the **families** cooperate, **their alcoholic loved ones** will soon see that **they are** suffering from distorted values. **The alcoholics** will perceive that **their** spiritual growth is lopsided, that for average **people** like **themselves**, a spiritual life which does not include family obligations may not be so perfect after all. If the **families** will appreciate that **their alcoholics'** current behavior is but a phase of development, all will be well. In the midst of an understanding and sympathetic family, these vagaries of spiritual infancy will quickly disappear.

The opposite may happen should the family condemn and criticize. **The alcoholics** may feel that for years **their** drinking has placed **them** on the wrong side of every argument, but that now **they have** become superior **people** with **a higher power** on **their** side. If the **families** persist in criticism, this fallacy may take a still greater hold. Instead of treating the **families** as **they** should, **they** may retreat further into **themselves** and feel **they have** spiritual justification for so doing.

Though the **families** do not fully agree with **the alcoholics'** spiritual activities, they should let **them** have **their** heads. **Though they may not be model family members yet, it is crucial that they help other alcoholics**. During those first days of convalescence, this will do more to insure **their** sobriety than anything else. Though some of **their**

manifestations are alarming and disagreeable, we think **they** will be on firmer foundation than **those** who **are placing** business or professional success ahead of spiritual development. **They** will be less likely to drink again, and anything is preferable to that.

Those of us who have spent much time in the world of spiritual make-believe have eventually seen the childishness of it. This dream world has been replaced by a great sense of purpose, accompanied by a growing consciousness of **a higher power** in our lives. We have come to believe that our feet ought to be firmly planted on earth. That is where our fellow travelers are, and that is where our work must be done. These are the realities for us. We have found nothing incompatible between a powerful spiritual experience and a life of sane and happy usefulness.

One more suggestion: Whether the family has spiritual convictions or not, they may do well to examine the principles by which the alcoholic member is trying to live. They can hardly fail to approve these simple principles, though the **alcoholic** still fails somewhat in practicing them. Nothing will help the **alcoholic** who is off on a spiritual tangent so much as the **loved one** who adopts a sane spiritual program, making a better practical use of it.

**Family roles may have to shift to accommodate a newly functional member. While the alcoholic was active, they weren't able to carry the load of a capable family member. As they return to health, it may be uncomfortable as others are forced to adjust around them.**

Drinking isolates most homes from the outside world. The alcoholics may have laid aside for years all normal activities. When they renew interest in such things, feelings of jealousy may arise. The family may feel they are owed more of the alcoholics' time and attention than is possible. Instead, family members ought to develop new channels of activity for themselves.

At the very beginning, the couple ought to frankly face the fact that each will have to yield here and there if the family is going to play an effective part in the new life. The alcoholics will necessarily spend much time with other alcoholics, but this activity should be balanced. New acquaintances who know nothing of alcoholism might be made and thoughtful consideration given their needs. The problems of the community might engage attention. Though the family may have no spiritual community involvement, they may wish to make contact with or take membership such a group.

Alcoholics who have derided spiritual people will be helped by such contacts. Being possessed of a spiritual experience, the alcoholics will find they have much in common with these people, though they

may differ with them on many matters. If **they do** not argue about **spiritual beliefs**, **they** will make new friends and **are** sure to find new avenues of usefulness and pleasure. **They** and **their** families can be bright spots in such **communities**. **They** may bring new hope and new courage to many a **spiritual teacher**. We intend the foregoing as a helpful suggestion only. So far as we are concerned, there is nothing obligatory about it. As non-denominational people, we cannot make up others' minds for them. **Individuals** should consult **their** own consciences.

We have been speaking to you of serious, sometimes tragic things. We have been dealing with alcohol in its worst aspect. But we aren't a glum lot. If newcomers could see no joy or fun in our existence, they wouldn't want it. We absolutely insist on enjoying life. We try not to indulge in cynicism over the state of the nations, nor do we carry the world's troubles on our shoulders. When we see **alcoholics** sinking into the mire that is alcoholism, we give **them** first aid and place what we have at **their** disposal. For **their** sake, we do recount and almost relive the horrors of our past. But those of us who have tried to shoulder the entire burden and trouble of others find we are soon overcome by them.

So we think cheerfulness and laughter make for usefulness. Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others.

Everybody knows that those in bad health, and those who seldom play, do not laugh much. So let each family play together or separately, as much as their circumstances warrant. We are sure [our higher powers](#) want us to be happy, joyous, and free. We cannot subscribe to the belief that this life is a vale of tears, though it once was just that for many of us. But it is clear that we made our own misery. [Our higher powers](#) didn't do it. Avoid then, the deliberate manufacture of misery, but if trouble comes, capitalize it as an opportunity to [grow](#).

Now about health: A body badly burned by alcohol does not often recover overnight nor do twisted thinking and depression vanish in a twinkling. We, who have recovered from serious drinking, are miracles of mental health. [We](#) have seen remarkable transformations in our bodies [as well](#).

Do not hesitate to take your health problems to [professionals](#). Try to remember that we should never belittle a good doctor or psychiatrist. Their services are often indispensable in treating newcomers and in following [their cases](#) afterward.

A word about sex relations. Alcohol is so sexually stimulating to some people that they have over-indulged. Couples are occasionally dismayed to find that when drinking is stopped the suffers from some amount of sexual dysfunction. Unless the reason is understood, there may be an emotional upset. Some of us had this experience, only to enjoy, in a few months, a finer intimacy than ever. There should be no hesitancy in consulting a doctor or psychologist if the condition persists. We do not know of many cases where this difficulty lasted long.

Alcoholics may find it hard to re-establish friendly relations with their children. Their young minds were impressionable while their alcoholic parents were drinking. Without saying so, they may cordially resent their parents for what they has done to them and to their non-alcoholic parents. The children are sometimes dominated by hardness and cynicism. They cannot seem to forgive and forget. This may hang on for months, long after their other family members have accepted the alcoholic's new way of living and thinking.

In time they will see that the alcoholics have become different people and in their own way the children will let them know it. When this happens, they can be invited to join in morning meditation and then they can take part in the daily discussion without rancor or bias. From that point on, progress will be rapid. Marvelous results often follow such a reunion.

Whether the family goes on a spiritual basis or not, the alcoholic members **have** to if **they** would recover. The others must be convinced of **their** new status beyond the shadow of a doubt. Seeing is believing to most families who have lived with a drinker.

Here is a case in point: One of our friends\* is a heavy smoker and coffee drinker. There was no doubt he over-indulged. Seeing this, and meaning to be helpful, his **partner** commenced to admonish him about it. He admitted he was overdoing these things, but frankly said that he was not ready to stop. His wife is one of those persons who really feels there is something rather sinful about these commodities, so she **expressed her disdain and intolerance. He became extremely angry, and soon** got drunk.

Of course our friend was wrong—dead wrong. He had to painfully admit that and mend his spiritual fences. Though he is now a most effective member of Alcoholics Anonymous, he still smokes and drinks coffee, but neither his **partner** nor anyone else stands in judgment. She sees she was wrong to make a burning issue out of such a matter when his more serious ailments were being rapidly **healed**.

We have three little mottoes which are apropos. Here they are:

*First Things First*

*Live and Let Live*

*Easy Does It.*

\**The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.*

## chapter 10

# TO EMPLOYERS

AMONG MANY employers nowadays, we think of one member\* who has spent much of his life in the world of big business. He has hired and fired hundreds of employees. He knows alcoholics as the employer sees them. His present views ought to prove exceptionally useful to working people everywhere.

But let him tell you:

I was at one time assistant manager of a corporation department employing sixty-six hundred people. One day my secretary came in saying that Mr. B— insisted on speaking with me. I told her to say that I was not interested. I had warned him several times that he had but one more chance. Not long afterward he had called me from Hartford on two successive days, so drunk he could hardly speak. I told him he was through—finally and forever.

My secretary returned to say that it was not Mr. B— on the phone; it was Mr. B—'s brother, and he wished to give me a message. I still expected a plea for clemency, but these words came through the receiver: "I just wanted to tell you Paul jumped from a hotel window in Hartford last Saturday. He left us a note saying you were the best boss he ever had, and that you were not to blame in any way."

*\* The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.*

Another time, as I opened a letter which lay on my desk, a newspaper clipping fell out. It was the obituary of one of the best salesperson I ever had. After two weeks of drinking, he had placed his toe on the trigger of a loaded shotgun—the barrel was in his mouth. I had discharged him for drinking six weeks before.

Still another experience: A woman's voice came faintly over long distance from Virginia. She wanted to know if her husband's company insurance was still in force. Four days before he had hanged himself in his woodshed. I had been obliged to discharge him for drinking, though he was brilliant, alert, and one of the best organizers I have ever known.

Here were three exceptional men lost to this world because I did not understand alcoholism as I do now. What irony—I became an alcoholic myself! And but for the intervention of an understanding person, I might have followed in their footsteps. My downfall cost the business community unknown thousands of dollars, for it takes real money to train a person for an executive position. This kind of waste goes on unabated. We think the business fabric is shot through with a situation which might be helped by better understanding all around.

Nearly all modern employers feel a moral responsibility for the well-being of their employees, and they try to meet these responsibilities. That they have not always done so for alcoholics is easily understood. To them, alcoholics have often seemed fools of the first magnitude. Because of the employees' special abilities, or of their own strong personal attachment to them, the employers have sometimes kept such people at work long beyond a reasonable period. Some employers have tried every known remedy. In only a few instances

has there been a lack of patience and tolerance. And we, who have imposed on the best of employers, can scarcely blame them if they have been short with us.

Here, for instance, is a typical example: An officer of one of the largest banking institutions in America knows I no longer drink. One day he told me about an executive of the same bank who, from his description, was undoubtedly alcoholic. This seemed to me like an opportunity to be helpful, so I spent two hours talking about alcoholism, the malady, and described the symptoms and results as well as I could. His comment was, "Very interesting. But I'm sure this man is done drinking. He has just returned from a three months leave of absence, has taken a cure, looks fine, and to clinch the matter, the board of directors told him this was his last chance."

The only answer I could make was that if the man followed the usual pattern, he would go on a bigger bust than ever. I felt this was inevitable and wondered if the bank was doing the man an injustice. Why not bring him into contact with some of our alcoholic crowd? He might have a chance. I pointed out that I had had nothing to drink whatever for three years, and this in the face of difficulties that would have made nine out of ten people drink their heads off. Why not at least afford him an opportunity to hear my story? "Oh no," said my friend, "this chap is either through with liquor, or he is minus a job. If he has your will power and guts, he will make the grade."

I wanted to throw up my hands in discouragement, for I saw that I had failed to help my banker friend understand. He simply could not believe that his brother-executive suffered from a serious illness. There was nothing to do but wait.

Presently the man did slip and was fired. Following his discharge, we contacted him. Without much ado, he accepted the principles and procedure that had helped us. He is undoubtedly on the road to recovery. To me, this incident illustrates lack of understanding as to what really ails the alcoholic, and lack of knowledge as to what part employers might profitably take in salvaging their sick employees.

If you desire to help it might be well to disregard your own drinking, or lack of it. Whether you are a hard drinker, a moderate drinker or a teetotaler, you may have some pretty strong opinions, perhaps prejudices. Those who drink moderately may be more annoyed with an alcoholic than a total abstainer would be. Drinking occasionally, and understanding your own reactions, it is possible for you to become quite sure of many things which, so far as the alcoholic is concerned, are not always so. As a moderate drinker, you can take your liquor or leave it alone. Whenever you want to, you control your drinking. Of an evening, you can go on a mild bender, get up in the morning, shake your head and go to business. To you, liquor is no real problem. You cannot see why it should be to anyone else, save the spineless and stupid.

When dealing with an alcoholic, there may be a natural annoyance that **anyone** could be so weak, stupid and irresponsible. Even when you understand the malady better, you may feel this feeling rising.

A look at the alcoholics in your organization is many times illuminating. **Are they** not usually brilliant, fastthinking, imaginative and likeable? When sober, **do they** not work hard and have a knack of

getting things done? If **they** had these qualities and did not drink would **they** be worth retaining? Should **they** have the same consideration as other ailing employees? **Are they** worth salvaging? If your decision is yes, whether the reason be humanitarian or business or both, then the following suggestions may be helpful.

Can you discard the feeling that you are dealing only with habit, with stubbornness, or a weak will? If this presents difficulty, re-reading chapters two and three, where the alcoholic sickness is discussed at length might be worth while. You, as a **professional**, want to know the necessities before considering the result. If you concede that your **alcoholic** employees **are** ill, can **they** be forgiven for what **they have** done in the past? Can **their** past absurdities be forgotten? Can it be appreciated that **they have** been victims of crooked thinking, directly caused by the action of alcohol on his brain?

I well remember the shock I received when a prominent doctor in Chicago told me of cases where pressure of the spinal fluid actually ruptured the brain. No wonder an alcoholic is strangely irrational. Who wouldn't be, with such a fevered brain? Normal drinkers are not so affected, nor can they understand the aberrations of the alcoholic.

Your **employee** has probably been trying to conceal a number of scrapes, perhaps pretty messy ones. They may be disgusting. You may be at a loss to understand how such a seemingly above-board **person** could be so involved. But these scrapes can generally be charged, no matter how bad, to the abnormal action of alcohol on **the** mind. When drinking, or getting over a bout, alcoholics, sometimes

the models of honesty when normal, will do incredible things. Afterward, **their** revulsion will be terrible. Nearly always, these antics indicate nothing more than temporary conditions.

This is not to say that all alcoholics are honest and upright when not drinking. Of course that isn't so, and such people often may impose on you. Seeing your attempt to understand and help, some **people** will try to take advantage of your kindness. If you are sure your **alcoholic employees** do not want to stop, **they** may as well be discharged, the sooner the better. You are not doing **them any** favors by keeping **them** on. Firing such individuals may prove a blessing to **them**. It may be just the jolt **they** need. I know, in my own particular case, that nothing my company could have done would have stopped me for, so long as I was able to hold my position, I could not possibly realize how serious my situation was. Had they fired me first, and had they then taken steps to see that I was presented with the solution contained in this book, I might have returned to them six months later, a well **person**.

But there are many **people** who want to stop, and with them you can go far. Your understanding treatment of their cases will pay dividends.

Perhaps you have such **people** in mind. **They** want to quit drinking and you want to help **them**, even if it be only a matter of good business. You now know more about alcoholism. You can see that **they are** mentally and physically sick. You are willing to overlook **their** past performances. Suppose an approach is made something like this:

State that you know about **their** drinking, and that it must stop. You might say you appreciate **their** abilities, would like to keep **them**, but cannot if **they** continue to drink. A firm attitude at this point has helped many of us.

Next **they** can be assured that you do not intend to lecture, moralize, or condemn; that if this was done formerly, it was because of misunderstanding. If possible express a lack of hard feeling toward **them**. At this point, it might be well to explain alcoholism, the illness. Say that you believe **they are** gravely ill, with this qualification—being perhaps fatally ill, do **they** want to get well? You ask, because many alcoholics, being warped and drugged, do not want to quit. But do **they**? Will **they** take every necessary step, submit to anything to get well, to stop drinking forever?

If **they** say yes, do **they** really mean it, or down inside do **they** think **they are** fooling you, and that after rest and treatment **they** will be able to get away with a few drinks now and then? We believe **people** should be thoroughly probed on these points. Be satisfied **they are** not deceiving **themselves** or you.

Whether you mention this book is a matter for your discretion. If **they** temporize and still think **they** can ever drink again, even beer, **they** might as well be discharged after the next bender which, if alcoholic, **they are** almost certain to have. **They** should understand that emphatically. Either you are dealing with **people** who can and will get well or you are not. If not, why waste time with **them**? This may seem severe, but it is usually the best course.

After satisfying yourself that your **alcoholics** want to recover and that **they** will go to any extreme to do so, you may suggest a definite course of action. For most alcoholics who are drinking, or who are

just getting over a spree, a certain amount of physical treatment is desirable, even imperative. The matter of physical treatment should, of course, be referred to a doctor. Whatever the method, its object is to thoroughly clear mind and body of the effects of alcohol. In competent hands, this seldom takes long nor is it very expensive. Your alcoholics will fare better if placed in such physical condition that they can think straight and no longer crave liquor.

If your alcoholics accept your offer, it should be pointed out that physical treatment is but a small part of the picture. Though you are providing them with the best possible medical attention, they should understand that they must undergo a change of heart. To get over drinking will require a transformation of thought and attitude. We all had to place recovery above everything, for without recovery we would have lost both home and livelihood.

Can you have every confidence in their ability to recover? While on the subject of confidence, can you adopt the attitude that so far as you are concerned this will be a strictly personal matter, that their alcoholic derelictions, the treatment about to be undertaken, will never be discussed without their consent? It might be well to have a long chat with them on their return.

To return to the subject matter of this book: It contains full suggestions by which the employees may solve their problem. To you, some of the ideas which it contains are novel. Perhaps you are not quite in sympathy with the approach we suggest. By no means do we offer it as the last word on this subject, but so far as we are concerned, it has worked with us. After all, are you not looking for results rather than methods? Whether your employees like it or not, they will learn the grim truth about alcoholism. That won't hurt them a bit, even though they do not go for this remedy.

We suggest you draw the book to the attention of the doctors who are to attend your patients during treatment. If the book is read the moment the patients are able, while acutely depressed, realization of their condition may come to them.

We hope the doctors will tell the patients the truth about their condition, whatever that happens to be. When they are presented with this volume it is best that no one tell them they must abide by its suggestions. They must decide for themselves.

You are betting, of course, that your changed attitude plus the contents of this book will turn the trick. In some cases it will, and in others it may not. But we think that if you persevere, the percentage of successes will gratify you. As our work spreads and our numbers increase, we hope your employees may be put in personal contact with some of us. Meanwhile, we are sure a great deal can be accomplished by the use of the book alone.

On your employees return, talk with them. Ask them if they think they have the answer. If they feel free to discuss their problems with you, if they know you understand and will not be upset by anything they wish to say, they will probably be off to a fast start.

In this connection, can you remain undisturbed if **they** proceed to tell you shocking things? **They** may, for example, reveal that **they have** padded **their** expense accounts or that **they have** planned to take your best customers away from you. In fact, **they** may say almost anything if **they have** accepted our solution which, as you know, demands rigorous honesty. Can you charge this off as you would a bad account and start fresh with **them**? If **they** owe you money you may wish to make terms.

If **they** speak of **their** home situations, you can undoubtedly make helpful suggestions. Can **they** talk frankly with you, **within reason**? With this kind of employee such an attitude will command undying loyalty.

The greatest enemies of us alcoholics are resentment, jealousy, envy, frustration, and fear. Wherever **people** are gathered together in **workplace settings** there will be rivalries and, arising out of these, a certain amount of politics. Sometimes we alcoholics have an idea that people are trying to pull us down. Often this is not so at all. But sometimes our drinking will be used politically.

One instance comes to mind in which a malicious individual\* was always making friendly little jokes about an alcoholic's drinking exploits. In this way he was slyly carrying tales. In another case, an alcoholic was sent to a hospital for treatment. Only a few knew of it at first but, within a short time, it was billboarded throughout the entire company. Naturally this sort of thing decreased the man's chance

\**The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.*

of recovery. The employer can many times protect the victim from this kind of talk. Employers cannot play favorites, but they can always defend someone from needless provocation and unfair criticism.

As a class, alcoholics are energetic people. They work hard and they play hard. Your employees should be on their mettle to make good. Being somewhat weakened, and faced with physical and mental readjustment to lives which know no alcohol, they may overdo. You may have to curb their desire to work sixteen hours a day. You may need to encourage them to play once in a while. They may wish to do a lot for other alcoholics and something of the sort may come up during business hours. A reasonable amount of latitude will be helpful. This work is necessary to maintain their sobriety.

After they have gone along without drinking for a few months, you may be able to make use of their services with other employees who are giving you the alcoholic run-around—provided, of course, they are willing to have a third party in the picture. Recovering alcoholics who hold lesser positions can talk to higher-ups in the workplace. Being on a radically different basis of life, they will never take advantage of the situation.

Your alcoholic may be trusted. Long experience with alcoholic excuses naturally arouses suspicion. When they next call saying they are sick, you might jump to the conclusion they are drunk. If they are, and are still trying to recover, they will hopefully tell you about it even if it means the loss of their jobs. For they know they must be honest if they would live at all. They will appreciate knowing you are not bothering your head about them, that you are not

suspicious nor are you trying to run **their lives** so **they** will be shielded from temptation to drink. If **they are** conscientiously following the program of recovery **they** can go anywhere **the job** may call **them**.

In case **they** do stumble, even once, you will have to decide whether to let **them** go. If you are sure **they** don't mean business, there is no doubt you should discharge **them**. If, on the contrary, you are sure **they are** doing **their** utmost, you may wish to give **them** another chance. But you should feel under no obligation to keep **them** on, for your obligation has been well discharged already.

It boils right down to this: No **persons** should be fired just because **they are** alcoholic. If **they** want to stop, **they** should be afforded a real chance. If **they** cannot or do not want to stop, **they** should be discharged. The exceptions are few.

We think this method of approach will accomplish several things. It will permit the rehabilitation of good **people**. At the same time you will feel no reluctance to rid yourself of those who cannot or will not stop. Alcoholism may be causing your organization considerable damage in its waste of time, **people** and reputation. We hope our suggestions will help you plug up this sometimes serious leak. We think we are sensible when we urge that you stop this waste and give your worthwhile **employee** a chance.

The other day an approach was made to the vice president\* of a large industrial concern. He remarked: "I'm mighty glad you **all found a way to stop** drinking. But the policy of this company is not to interfere with the habits of our employees. If **they** drink so much that **their jobs** suffer, we fire **them**. I don't see how you can be of any help to us

*\* The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.*

for, as you see, we don't have any alcoholic problem." This same company spends millions for research every year. Their cost of production is figured to a fine decimal point. They have recreational facilities. There is company insurance. There is a real interest, both humanitarian and business, in the well-being of employees. But alcoholism—well, they just don't believe they have it.

Perhaps this is a typical attitude. We, who have collectively seen a great deal of professional life, at least from the alcoholic angle, had to smile at this person's sincere opinion. He might be shocked if he knew how much alcoholism is costing his organization a year. That company may harbor many actual or potential alcoholics. We believe that managers of large enterprises often have little idea how prevalent this problem is. Even if you feel your organization has no alcoholic problem, it might pay to take another look down the line. You may make some interesting discoveries.

Of course, this chapter refers to alcoholics, sick people. What our friend, the vice president, had in mind was the habitual or recreational drinker. As to them, his policy is undoubtedly sound, but he did not distinguish between such people and the alcoholic.

It is not to be expected that alcoholic employees will receive a disproportionate amount of time and attention. They should not be made favorites. The right kind of people, the kind who recover, will not want this sort of thing. They will not impose. Far from it. They will work diligently and gratefully.

Today I own a little company. There are two alcoholic employees, who produce as much as five normal salesmen. But why not? They have a new attitude, and they have been saved from a living death. I have enjoyed every moment spent in getting them straightened out.

## chapter 11

### A VISION FOR YOU

FOR MOST normal folks, drinking means conviviality, companionship and colorful imagination. It means release from care, boredom and worry. It is joyous intimacy with friends and a feeling that life is good. But not so with us in those last days of heavy drinking. The old pleasures were gone. They were but memories. Never could we recapture the great moments of the past. There was an insistent yearning to enjoy life as we once did and a heartbreaking obsession that some new miracle of control would enable us to do it. There was always one more attempt—and one more failure.

The less people tolerated us, the more we withdrew from society, from life itself. As we became [slaves to our addiction](#), shivering denizens of [its](#) mad realm, the chilling vapor that is loneliness settled down. It thickened, ever becoming blacker. Some of us sought out sordid places hoping to find understanding companionship and approval. Momentarily we did—then would come oblivion and the awful awakening to face the hideous [terror](#), [bewilderment](#), [frustration](#), [and despair that was our reality](#). Unhappy drinkers who read this page will understand!

Now and then serious drinkers, being dry at the moment say, “I don’t miss it at all. Feel better. Work better. Having a better time.” As ex-problem drinkers, we smile at such [people](#). We know our friends

are like children whistling in the dark to keep up their spirits. They fool themselves. Inwardly they would give anything to take half a dozen drinks and get away with them. They will presently try the old game again, for they aren't happy about their sobriety. They cannot picture life without alcohol. Some day they will be unable to imagine life either with alcohol or without it. Then they will know loneliness such as few do. They will be at the jumping-off place. They will wish for the end.

We have shown how we got out from under. You say, "Yes, I'm willing. But am I to be consigned to a life where I shall be stupid, boring and glum, like some righteous people I see? I know I must get along without liquor, but how can I? Have you a sufficient substitute?"

Yes, there is a substitute and it is vastly more than that. It is a community in Alcoholics Anonymous. There you will find release from care, boredom and worry. Your imagination will be fired. Life will mean something at last. The most satisfactory years of your existence lie ahead. Thus we find the community, and so will you.

"How is that to come about?" you ask. "Where am I to find these people?"

You are going to meet these new friends in your own area. Near you, alcoholics are dying helplessly like people in a sinking ship. If you live in a large place, there are hundreds. High and low, rich and poor, these are future members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Among them you will make lifelong friends. You will be bound to them with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will

commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey. Then you will know what it means to give of yourself that others may survive and rediscover life. You will learn the full meaning of **loving others as ourselves**.

It may seem incredible that these **people** are to become happy, respected, and useful once more. How can they rise out of such misery, bad reputation and hopelessness? The practical answer is that since these things have happened among us, they can happen with you. Should you wish them above all else, and be willing to make use of our experience, we are sure they will come. The age of miracles is still with us. Our own recovery proves that!

Our hope is that when this chip of a book is launched on the world tide of alcoholism, defeated drinkers will seize upon it, to follow its suggestions. Many, we are sure, will rise to their feet and march on. They will approach still other sick ones and **communities** of Alcoholics Anonymous may spring up in each city and hamlet, havens for those who must find a way out.

In the chapter “Working With Others” you gathered an idea of how we approach and aid others to health. Suppose now that through you several families have adopted this way of life. You will want to know more of how to proceed from that point. Perhaps the best way of treating you to a glimpse of your future will be to describe the growth of the fellowship among us. Here is a brief account:

Years ago, in 1935, one\* of our number made a journey to a certain western city. From a business standpoint, his trip came off badly. Had he been successful in his enterprise, he would have been set on

*\*The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.*

his feet financially which, at the time, seemed vitally important. But his venture wound up in a lawsuit and bogged down completely. The proceeding was shot through with much hard feeling and controversy.

Bitterly discouraged, he found himself in a strange place, discredited and almost broke. Still physically weak, and sober but a few months, he saw that his predicament was dangerous. He wanted so much to talk with someone, but whom?

One dismal afternoon he paced a hotel lobby wondering how his bill was to be paid. At one end of the room stood a glass covered directory of local churches. Down the lobby a door opened into an attractive bar. He could see the animated crowd inside. In there he would find companionship and release. Unless he took some drinks, he might not have the courage to scrape an acquaintance and would have a lonely week-end.

Of course he couldn't drink, but why not sit hopefully at a table, a bottle of ginger ale before him? After all, had he not been sober six months now? Perhaps he could handle, say, three drinks—no more! Fear gripped him. He was on thin ice. Again it was the old, insidious insanity—that first drink. With a shiver, he turned away and walked down the lobby to the church directory. Music and lively chatter still floated to him from the bar.

But what about his responsibilities—his family and the people who would die because they would not know how to get well, ah—yes, those other alcoholics? There must be many such in this town. He would phone a clergyman. His sanity returned and he thanked his

higher power. Selecting a church at random from the directory, he stepped into a booth and lifted the receiver. His call to the clergyman led him presently to a certain resident of the town, who, though formerly able and respected, was then nearing the nadir of alcoholic despair. It was the usual situation: home in jeopardy, partner ill, children distracted, bills in arrears and standing damaged. He had a desperate desire to stop, but saw no way out, for he had earnestly tried many avenues of escape. Painfully aware of being somehow abnormal, the man did not fully realize what it meant to be alcoholic.\*

When our friend related his experience, the man agreed that no amount of will power he might muster could stop his drinking for long. A spiritual experience, he conceded, was absolutely necessary, but the price seemed high upon the basis suggested. He told how he lived in constant worry about those who might find out about his alcoholism. He had, of course, the familiar alcoholic obsession that few knew of his drinking. Why, he argued, should he lose the remainder of his business, only to bring still more suffering to his family by foolishly admitting his plight to people from whom he made his livelihood? He would do anything, he said, but that.

Being intrigued, however, he invited our friend to his home. Some time later, and just as he thought he was getting control of his liquor situation, he went on a roaring bender. For him, this was the spree that ended all sprees. He saw that he would have to face his problems squarely that a higher power might give him mastery.

\*This refers to Bill's first visit with Dr. Bob. These men later became co-founders of A.A. Bill's story opens the text of this book; Dr. Bob's heads the Story Section (not included in this edition).

One morning he took the bull by the horns and set out to tell those he feared what his trouble had been. He found himself surprisingly well received, and learned that many knew of his drinking. Stepping into his car, he made the rounds of people he had hurt. He trembled as he went about, for this might mean ruin, particularly to a person in his line of business.

At midnight he came home exhausted, but very happy. He has not had a drink since. As we shall see, he now means a great deal to his community, and the major liabilities of thirty years of hard drinking have been repaired in four.

But life was not easy for the two friends. Plenty of difficulties presented themselves. Both saw that they must keep spiritually active. One day they called up the head nurse of a local hospital. They explained their need and inquired if she had a first class alcoholic prospect.

She replied, "Yes, we've got a corker. He's just beaten up a couple of nurses. Goes off his head completely when he's drinking. But he's a grand chap when he's sober, though he's been in here eight times in the last six months. Understand he was once a well-known lawyer in town, but just now we've got him strapped down tight."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>*This refers to Bill's and Dr. Bob's first visit to A.A. Number Three. See the Pioneer Section (not included in this edition). This resulted in A.A.'s first group, at Akron, Ohio, in 1935.*

Here was a prospect all right but, by the description, none too promising. The use of spiritual principles in such cases was not so well understood as it is now. But one of the friends said, "Put him in a private room. We'll be down."

Two days later, a future [member](#) of Alcoholics Anonymous stared glassily at the strangers beside his bed. "Who are you fellows, and why this private room? I was always in a ward before."

Said one of the visitors, "We're giving you a treatment for alcoholism."

Hopelessness was written large on the man's face as he replied, "Oh, but that's no use. Nothing would fix me. I'm a goner. The last three times, I got drunk on the way home from here. I'm afraid to go out the door. I can't understand it."

For an hour, the two friends told him about their drinking experiences. Over and over, he would say: "That's me. That's me. I drink like that."

The man in the bed was told of the acute poisoning from which he suffered, how it deteriorates the body of an alcoholic and warps his mind. There was much talk about the mental state preceding the first drink.

"Yes, that's me," said the sick man, "the very image. You fellows know your stuff all right, but I don't see what good it'll do. You fellows are somebody. I was once, but I'm a nobody now. From what you tell me, I know more than ever I can't stop." At this both the visitors burst into a laugh. Said the future [member](#): "Damn little to laugh about that I can see."

The two friends spoke of their spiritual experience and told him about the course of action they carried out.

He interrupted: "I used to be strong for [spiritual community](#), but that won't fix it. I've prayed to [a higher power](#) on hangover mornings and sworn that I'd never touch another drop but by nine o'clock I'd be boiled as an owl."

Next day found the prospect more receptive. He had been thinking it over. "Maybe you're right," he said. "[A higher power](#) ought to be able to do anything." Then he added, "[It](#) sure didn't do much for me when I was trying to fight this booze racket alone."

On the third day the lawyer gave his life to the care and direction of his [higher power](#), and said he was perfectly willing to do anything necessary. His [partner](#) came, scarcely daring to be hopeful, though she thought she saw something different about her [mate](#) already. He had begun to have a spiritual experience.

That afternoon he put on his clothes and walked from the hospital a free man. He entered a political campaign, making speeches, frequenting gathering places of all sorts, often staying up all night. He lost the race by only a narrow margin. But he had found [a higher power](#)—and in finding [his higher power](#) had found himself.

That was in June, 1935. He never drank again. He too, has become a respected and useful member of his community. He has helped other men recover, and is a power in the [spiritual community](#) from which he was long absent.

So, you see, there were three alcoholics in that town, who now felt they had to give to others what they had found, or be sunk. After several failures to find others, a fourth turned up. He came through an acquaintance who had heard the good news. He proved to be a [reckless](#) young fellow whose parents could not make out whether he wanted to stop drinking or not. They were deeply [spiritual](#) people, much shocked by their son's refusal to have anything to do with [their](#)

spiritual community. He suffered horribly from his sprees, but it seemed as if nothing could be done for him. He consented, however, to go to the hospital, where he occupied the very room recently vacated by the lawyer.

He had three visitors. After a bit, he said, "The way you fellows put this spiritual stuff makes sense. I'm ready to do business. I guess the old folks were right after all." So one more was added to the community of Alcoholics Anonymous.

All this time our friend of the hotel lobby incident remained in that town. He was there three months. He now returned home, leaving behind his first acquaintance, the lawyer and the reckless chap. These people had found something brand new in life. Though they knew they must help other alcoholics if they would remain sober, that motive became secondary. It was transcended by the happiness they found in giving themselves for others. They shared their homes, their slender resources, and gladly devoted their spare hours to fellow-sufferers. They were willing, by day or night, to place new people in the hospital and visit them afterward. They grew in numbers. They experienced a few distressing failures, but in those cases they made an effort to bring the person's family into a spiritual way of living, thus relieving much worry and suffering.

A year and six months later these three had succeeded with seven more. Seeing much of each other, scarce an evening passes that someone's home did not shelter a little gathering of people, happy in their release, and constantly thinking how they might present their discovery to some newcomer. In addition to these casual get-togethers, it became customary to set apart one night a week for a meeting

to be attended by anyone or everyone interested in a spiritual way of life. Aside from **community** and sociability, the prime object was to provide a time and place where new people might bring their problems.

Outsiders became interested. One **member** and his **partner** placed their large home at the disposal of this strangely assorted crowd. This couple has since become so fascinated that they have dedicated their home to the work. Many distracted **loved ones of an alcoholics** **have** visited this house to find loving and understanding companionship among **other loved ones of alcoholics** who knew **their** problems, to hear from the lips of their **alcoholics** what had happened to them, to be advised how **their** own wayward **loved ones** might be hospitalized and approached when next **they** stumbled.

Many **alcoholics**, yet dazed from **their** hospital experiences, **have** stepped over the threshold of that home into freedom. Many who entered there came away with an answer. **They** succumbed to that **cheerful** crowd inside, who laughed at their own misfortunes and understood **those of the newcomers**. Impressed by those who visited **them** at the hospital, **they** capitulated entirely when, later, in an upper room of this house, **they** heard the stories of some **others** whose experience closely tallied with **their** own. The expression on the faces of the **loved ones**, that indefinable something in the eyes of the **alcoholics**, the stimulating and electric atmosphere of the place, conspired to let him know that here was haven at last.

The very practical approach to **their** problems, the absence of intolerance of any kind, the informality, the genuine democracy, the uncanny understanding which these people had were irresistible.

Alcoholics and their loved ones would leave elated by the thought of what they could now do for stricken acquaintance and their families. They knew they had a host of new friends; it seemed they had known these strangers always. They had seen miracles, and one was to come to them. They had visioned the great reality—their loving higher powers.

Now, this house will hardly accommodate its weekly visitors, for they number sixty or eighty as a rule. Alcoholics are being attracted from far and near. From surrounding towns, families drive long distances to be present. A community thirty miles away has fifteen members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Being a large place, we think that some day its community will number many hundreds.\*

But life among Alcoholics Anonymous is more than attending gatherings and visiting hospitals. Cleaning up old scrapes, helping to settle family differences, explaining the disinherited alcoholics to their irate parents, lending money and securing jobs for each other, when justified—these are everyday occurrences. No one is too discredited or has sunk too low to be welcomed cordially—if they mean business. Social distinctions, petty rivalries and jealousies—these are laughed out of countenance. Being wrecked in the same vessel, being restored and united by a power greater than themselves, with hearts and minds attuned to the welfare of others, the things which matter so much to some people no longer signify much to them. How could they?

\* Written in 1939.

Under only slightly different conditions, the same thing is taking place in many eastern cities. In one of these there is a well-known hospital for the treatment of alcoholic and drug addiction. Six years ago one\* of our number was a patient there. Many of us have felt, for the first time, the presence of a higher power within its walls. We are greatly indebted to the doctor in attendance there, for he, although it might prejudice his own work, has told us of his belief in ours.

Every few days this doctor suggests our approach to one of his patients. Understanding our work, he can do this with an eye to selecting those who are willing and able to recover on a spiritual basis. Many of us, former patients, go there to help. Then, in this eastern city, there are informal meetings such as we have described to you, where you may now see scores of members. There are the same fast friendships, there is the same helpfulness to one another as you find among our western friends. There is a good bit of travel between East and West and we foresee a great increase in this helpful interchange.

Some day we hope that any alcoholics who journey will find a community of Alcoholics Anonymous at their destination. To some extent this is already true. Some of us travel for work. Little clusters of twos and threes and fives of us have sprung up in other communities, through contact with our two larger centers. Those of us who travel drop in as often as we can. This practice enables us to lend a hand, at the same time avoiding certain alluring distractions of the road, about which any traveler can inform you.\*\*

\* The examples given in this text are exclusively male; because they are reported experiences of actual individuals, the genders have not been changed to represent an equal sample.

\*\* Written in 1939. As of 1965, there were already some 11,000 groups in over 90 countries, with an estimated membership of over 350,000. As of January 2015, there were an estimated 115,000 groups in over 175 countries, with an estimated membership of over 2,000,000.

Thus we grow. And so can you, though you be but one **person** with this book in your hand. We believe and hope it contains all you will need to begin.

We know what you are thinking. You are saying to yourself: “I’m jittery and alone. I couldn’t do that.” But you can. You forget that you have just now tapped a source of power much greater than yourself. To duplicate, with such backing, what we have accomplished is only a matter of willingness, patience and labor.

We know of an A.A. member\* who was living in a large community. He had lived there but a few weeks when he found that the place probably contained more alcoholics per square mile than any city in the country. This was only a few days ago at this writing. (1939) The authorities were much concerned. He got in touch with a prominent psychiatrist who had undertaken certain responsibilities for the mental health of the community. The doctor proved to be able and exceedingly anxious to adopt any workable method of handling the situation. So he inquired, what did our friend have on the ball?

Our friend proceeded to tell him. And with such good effect that the doctor agreed to a test among his patients and certain other alcoholics from a clinic which he attends. Arrangements were also made with the chief psychiatrist of a large public hospital to select still others from the stream of misery which flows through that institution.

So our fellow worker will soon have friends galore. Some of them may sink and perhaps never get up, but if our experience is a criterion, more than half of those approached will become **members** of Alcoholics Anonymous. When a few **people** in this city have found

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themselves, and have discovered the joy of helping others to face life again, there will be no stopping until everyone in that town has had an opportunity to recover— if **able and willing**.

Still you may say: “But I will not have the benefit of contact with you who write this book.” We cannot be sure. **A higher power** will determine that, so you must remember that your real reliance is always upon **a power greater than yourself**. It will show you how to create the **community** you crave.\*

Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. **Your higher power** will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the **alcoholic** who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven’t got. See to it that your relationship with **your higher power** is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the **great fact** for us.

Abandon yourself to **a power greater than yourself** as you understand it. Admit your faults to **you higher power** and to your **community**. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the **community** of the spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the **road of happy destiny**.

*\*Alcoholics Anonymous will be glad to hear from you. Address  
P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.*





## APPENDIX

### EXCISED LANGUAGE OF EXCLUSION

men and women	Him	We are people who
wives	He	normally would not mix.
his	His	brotherly
defectives	God	him
laymen	Him	wives
man	He	his
he	His	wives
he	Him	himself
men	sins	man
men	God	he
wife	He	he
his	Creator	his
men	the power of God	he
Few people really are	the Father of Light who	man
[atheists]	presides over us all	he
God	God	Holier Than Thou
God	men	he
Brotherhood of Man	His	like a gentleman
Devil	men	fellow
he	his	his
seemed the Boss	he	his
Universal, and he	he	he
God	he	he
religious	he	“She’s such a sweet girl,
God	he	I should think he’d stop
His	man	for her sake.”
men	men	him
God	men	he
God	his	him
Him	men	he
God		he

him	he	he
him	he	he
his	his	his
man	his	himself
he	him	he
he	he	God's
he	his	he
his	he	himself
he	he	God
his	he	heaven
he	him	God's
fellow	he	Creator
his	him	He
he	he	men
he	him	men
he	he	men
he	he	hand of God
his	he	men
his	him	God
he	he	children of a living
fellows	he	Creator
him	his	himself
he	him	his
he	his	most of us favor
he	his	[religious] membership
he	him	Many who once were
he	he	[agnostic] are now
him	he	among our members
he	man	his
his	himself	his
his	he	his
himself	he	God
his	he	men and women
he	he	he
fellow	he	his
he	himself	he
he	his	his
he	man	men and women

man	he	men
men	he	God
men	his	God
his	man	God
like a gentleman	he	Him
him	fellows	man
he	fellows	he
him he	fellows	him
he	men	he
he	men	his
him	men	man
him	he	he
he	His	him
he	he	he
he	he	himself
he	he	mankind
himself	God	All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence
him	man	God
chap	his	God's ever advancing Creation
him	his	himself
he	his	himself
him	God	men and women
he	man	himself
he	he	statesman
his	he	men and women
he	his	God
he	Him	men's
he	God	man
his	godly	God
he	Supreme Being	the conquest of the air
his	Supreme Being	longshoreman
wife	God	he
he	God	bedeivements
he	Him	God
his	Creative Intelligence	God
he	Spirit of the Universe	God
himself	God	God
his	Him	God

man's	Him	man
God	God	minister
He	God	sins
God	defects of character	him
He	Him	he
God	God	God
man	Him	His
God	His	God
man, woman, and child	saints	God
God	God	God
God	He	He
He	God	His
He	Him	He
He	his	Father
God	his	He
He	he	Him
religious	he	His
God	he	His
God	he	Maker
Creator	he	Him
God	him	God
Maker	he	Thee
God	himself	Thou wilt
He	He	Take away my
Him	him	difficulties, that victory
Him	he	over them may bear
Himself	he	witness to those I would
men and women who are	He	help, of Thy Power, Thy
constitutionally incapable	his	Love, and Thy way of life.
of being honest with	he	May I do Thy will always!
themselves	he	Him
they seem to have been	he	wife
born that way. They are	he	God
naturally incapable	he	he
there is One who has all	he	himself
power—that One is God.	his	wife
May you find Him now!	he	wife
His	his	mistress
God	He	wife

her	Him	we have admitted are
men	Creator	objectionable
God	defects	He now take them all
man	cast out	God
him	God	My Creator
God, save me from being	defects	good and bad
angry.	defects	remove from me every
Thy will be done.	He	single defect of character
God	he	fellows
man's	he	"Faith without works
wife	his	is dead."
evil	fellows	fellows
God	He	victory over
God	his	God
We are in the world to	he	him
play the role He assigns.	he	religious
do as we think He would	his	man
have us	he	He
Him	he	God
does He enable	He	the man we hated
Creator	him	he
All men of faith have	he	him
Courage.	he	him
They trust their God.	himself	him
ask God to remove	He	him
Him	He	His
what He would have	men	man
us be	wives	his
man	he	his
his	he	She
God	he	himself
He	He	God
God-given	Creator	Creator
God	God	God's hands
God alone can judge	Him	church
God	man	sermon
God	God remove from us	women
men	all the things which	
God		

wife	he	simple way we have just outlined.
she	wife	
husband	he	“Faith without works is dead.”
himself	mothers and wives	fellowship
He	his	ministers, priests
he	man	Ministers
“the girl who understands”	he	him
she	He	he
man	his	him
he	his	his
married	wife	he
girl	Ma	him
him	Creator	wife
wife	God’s people	his
her	God	his
she	ask God to remove	his
her	God’s will	his
She	“How can I best serve	his
She	Thee—Thy will (not	religious
woman	mine) be done.”	his
she	Him who has all	him
her	knowledge and power	he
God willing	His Spirit	he
wife	God-conscious	him
husband	men	he
If we can forget, so can she.	God’s	he
she	God	his
that most terrible human emotion—jealousy	God gave us brains to use	him
Good generalship	God	he
the problem be attacked on the flank rather than risk a face-to-face combat	God	he
he	wives	he
he	Suggestions...may be obtained from one’s priest, minister, or rabbi.	his
he	“Thy will be done.”	him
	We alcoholics are undisciplined. So we let God discipline us in the	him
		he
		he

him	he	he
him	He	His
him	his	religious
his	he	he
he	him	he
man	he	he
his	him	his
man	him	He
he	his	him
he	he	him
he	he	he
he	his	his
man	him	his
he	he	he
He	he	he
he	he	him
his	he	he
him	himself	he
he	his	denominations
He	him	him
man	he	him
him	his	him
him	him	he
himself	he	him
he	his	he
him	he	he
he	him	he
him	he	his
he	him	he
his	man	his
him	he	he
him	He	he
his	he	he
he	him	he
him	he	he
him	himself	him
him	he	him
he	he	he

He	God	his
he	he	head of the family
He	he	he
him	him	men
he	his	God
him	God	He
Fellowship	man	he
he	he	his
him	he	wife
himself	Fellowship	wife
him	man	God
him	He	man
he	he	he
man	him	he
him	him	God
he	he	he
he	his	he
him	he	he
his	He	he
him	he	his
him	him	he
him	him	He
he	man	his
he	he	man's
his	family	he
his	he	man
him	him	his
he	him	wife
he	his	his
he	his	his
he	Good Samaritan	he
him	wives	his
he	wife	wife
himself	she	his
he	him	his
He	he	God
wife	his	men
he	him	man

God's hands	wives	crockery, and ripped the
dictates	men	keys out of pianos.
man	wives	woman
man's	*Written in 1939, when	husbands
he	there were few women in	father and mother
his defects of character	AA, this chapter assumes	husband's parents
he	that the alcoholic in the	We finally sought
his	home is likely to be the	employment ourselves as
wife	husband. But many of	destitution faced us and
his	the suggestions given	our families.
His	here may be adapted	men
woman	to help the person who	men
husband	lives with a woman	wives
he	alcoholic— whether	men
man	she is still drinking or	married
himself	is recovering in AA A	woman
he	further source of help is	husband
he	noted on page 121.	husband
God will keep you	husbands	he
unharmed	men	his
he	husbands'	he
WITH FEW	men	he
EXCEPTIONS, our book	men	men
thus far has spoken of	men of the house	husbands
men. But what we have	husbands	fathers
said applies quite as	never	husband
much to women. Our	An armored car could	he
activities in behalf of	not have brought the	He
women who drink are	pay envelopes home. The	him
on the increase. There	checking account melted	he
is every evidence that	like snow in June.	he
women regain their	women	he
health as readily as	men	he
men if they try our	ladies	men
suggestions.	husbands	as a club over your head
wife who trembles in fear	father	him
mother and father	father	he
son	They struck the children,	him
wives	kicked out door panels,	your children
wives	smashed treasured	

he	He	and good temper are most necessary.
his	He	
he	husband	Our next thought is that you should never tell him what he must do about his drinking. If he gets the idea that you are a nag or a killjoy, your chance of accomplishing anything useful may be zero. He will use that as an excuse to drink more. He will tell you he is misunderstood. This may lead to lonely evenings for you. He may seek someone else to console him—not always another man.
husband	husband	
His	he	
he	His	
him	his	
he	he	
he	He	
his	he	
He	He	
he	he	
his	He	
him	he	
his	His	
He	husband	husband's
he	He	children
him	He	husband
husband	he	women
he	he	husband
he	him	Your husband may come to appreciate your reasonableness and patience.
He	him	Try to have him bring up the subject himself. Be sure you are not critical during such a discussion. Attempt instead, to put yourself in his place.
He	husbands	
he	husband	
He	he	
he	He	
his	his	
His	His	
He	him	
he	he	his
He	The first principle of success is that you should never be angry. Even though your husband becomes unbearable and you have to leave him temporarily, you should, if you can, go without rancor. Patience	him
his		he
He		him
he		though perhaps needlessly
he		he
he		he
he		he

him	for he may be angry	The power of God goes deep!
his	him	husband
him	him	men
his power to stop or moderate.	he	get over alcoholism
Say you do not want to be a wet blanket	him	The wives and children of such men suffer horribly, but not more than the men themselves.
him	his	women
He	husband	women
his	he	If your husband is a drinker, you probably worry over what other people are thinking and you hate to meet your friends. You draw more and more into yourself and you think everyone is talking about conditions at your home. You avoid the subject of drinking, even with your own parents. You do not know what to tell the children. When your husband is bad, you become a trembling recluse, wishing the telephone had never been invented.
husband	joyfully	husband
husband's	He	his
husband	he	But you must be on guard not to embarrass or harm your husband.
usually	he	he
himself	he	as though your husband were a weak character. He may be anything but that.
wife	Again, you should not crowd him. Let him decide for himself. Cheerfully see him through moresprees. Talk about his condition or this book only when he raises the issue. In some cases it may be better to let someone outside the family present the book. They can urge action without arousing hostility. If your husband is otherwise a normal individual, your chances are good at this stage.	He
If you act upon these principles, your husband may stop or moderate	men	
husband	men	
husband	men	
his	men	
him	husband	
he	His	
he	he	
he	he	
he	him	
he	his	
cooperation		
he		
him		
him		
his		
He		
men		
himself		
him		
he		

Unless they actually	women	he
need protection from	husbands	he
their father, it is best	God	he
not to take sides in any	husband	his
argument he has with	him	husbands
them while drinking.	God	husband
Frequently,	husband	him
tell your husband's	husband	he
employer and his friends	husband	count your blessings
that he was sick, when	husband	he
as a matter of fact he	husband	husband
was tight.	husband	he
husband	especially to your	husband
him	husband	he
he	Often you must carry the	his
he	burden of avoiding them	he
him	or keeping them under	men
he	control.	You feel he should now
in good spirits	husband	be yours.
Ask him what you should	Just be careful not to	he
do if he places you in	disagree in a resentful or	his
such a position again.	critical spirit.	Sometimes he will
But be careful not to be	husband	be so interested that
resentful about the last	will	he becomes really
time he did so.	he	neglectful. Your house
husband	smile	is filled with strangers.
his position	husband	You may not like some of
disgrace	he	them. He gets stirred up
Should it happen again,	his	about their troubles, but
regard it in a different	husband	not at all about yours.
light. Maybe it will	he	It will do little good if
prove a blessing! It may	He	you point that out and
convince your husband	His	urge more attention for
he wants to stop drinking	him	yourself. We find it a real
forever. And now you	him	mistake to dampen his
know that he can stop if	women	enthusiasm for alcoholic
he will!	man	work. You should join in
God	chap	his efforts as much as
God	husbands	you possibly can.
He	his	wives
wives	woman	his
husbands	husband	woman
		husband

wife	he	he
husband	him	he
cooperate, rather than complain, you will find that his excess enthusiasm will tone down.	he	The alcoholic's past thus becomes the principle asset of the family and frequently it is almost the only one!
husband	he	God's hands
husband	God has either removed your husband's liquor problem or He has not.	his wife
he	He	Husbands and wives
he	husband	he
get over drinking	God's hands	man
he	Good luck and God bless you!	himself
men	husbands, wives	the very devil
husband	women folk	It takes some of us a long time to outgrow that serious handicap [of sensitivity].
he	wife	man
his	husband	He
he	he	his
You need not remind him of his spiritual deficiency—he will know of it.	his wife, his children, his "in-laws"	he
him	himself or herself	he
his	his or her	his
he	him	he
Cheer him up and ask him how you can be still more helpful.	his	he
The slightest sign of fear or intolerance may lessen your husband's chance of recovery. In a weak moment he may take your dislike of his high- stepping friends as one of those insanely trivial excuses to drink.	wife or child	his
man's	his	Dad
him	father	He may take small interest in the children and may show irritation when reprov'd for his delinquencies.
his	dad	he
his	dad	gay
	God	him
	the head of the house	Mother may complain of inattention.
	Father	him
	he	He
	him	He
	he	
	he	
	him	

he	Little by little, mother	he
mother and children	and children will see	himself
father	they ask too much, and	He
him	father will see he gives	he
him	too little.	he
he	father	his
his	he	dad
dad	man	he
himself	He	He
He	religious	his
he	He	man
he	his	himself
his	dad	his
father	He	dad's
dad	God	his
he	he	dad's
praise his progresslea	He may tell mother,	Dad
his	who has been religious	his
disappear	all her life, that she	him
head of the house	doesn't know what it's all	he
he	about, and that she had	God
his	better get his brand of	his
He	spirituality while there is	father
his	yet time.	he
he	father	he
man	God	himself
He	dad's	he
he	he	dad's
his	God	him
We know that there	father	his
are difficult wives	him	Even if he displays a
and families, but the	Dad	certain amount of neglect
man who is getting	he	and irresponsibility
over alcoholism must	his	towards the family, it is
remember he did much	God	well to let him go as far
to make them so.	father	as he likes in helping
his	He	other alcoholics.
he	dad's	him
	Father	he

his	and comes to a friendly agreement about them.	We are convinced that a spiritual mode of living is a most powerful health restorative
his		
dad	Father	
man	he	Hardly one of our crowd now shows any mark of dissipation.
He	The family may feel they hold a mortgage on dad, so big that no equity should be left for outsiders. Instead of developing new channels of activity for themselves, mother and children demand that he stay home and make up the deficiency.	But this does not mean that we disregard human health measures. God has abundantly supplied this world with fine doctors, psychologists, and practitioners of various kinds.
God	Father	
He would like us to keep our heads in the clouds with Him	religious	though God has wrought miracles among us
head of the house	religious body	Most of them give freely of themselves, that their fellows may enjoy sound minds and bodies.
man	religious	
wife	he	his
There will be other profound changes in the household. Liquor incapacitated father for so many years that mother became head of the house. She met these responsibilities gallantly. By force of circumstances, she was often obliged to treat father as a sick or wayward child. Even when he wanted to assert himself he could not, for his drinking placed him constantly in the wrong. Mother made all the plans and gave the directions. When sober, father usually obeyed. Thus mother, through no fault of her own, became accustomed to wearing the family trousers. Father, coming suddenly to life again, often begins to assert himself. This means trouble, unless the family watches for these tendencies in each other	he	One of the many doctors who had the opportunity of reading this book in manuscript form told us that the use of sweets was often helpful, of course depending upon a doctor's advice. He thought all alcoholics should constantly have chocolate available for its quick energy value at times of fatigue. He added that occasionally in the night a vague craving arose which would be satisfied by candy. Many of us have noticed a tendency to eat sweets and have found this practice beneficial.
	he	
	he	
	religious	
	he	
	He	
	his	
	congregations	
	He	
	pries, minister, or rabbi	
	his	
	minister	
	his	
	man	
	him	
	his	
	his	
	God	
	God	
	cheerfully	
	demonstrate His omnipotence	men man tends to be impotent

his	he	he
he	he	he
him	business man	man
hate	he	he
he	he	himself
mother	his	he
pathetic	he	he
dad's	his	he
man	man	he
him	chap	He
he	his	man
his	his	him
wife	men	man
wife	man	he
sinful	he	man
she nagged, and her intolerance finally threw him into a fit of anger	him him him	he If you propose such a procedure to him, it may be necessary to advance the cost of treatment, but we believe it should be made plain that any expense will later be deducted from his pay. It is better for him to feel fully responsible.
wife	he	man
cured	man	man
men	men	man
him	man	He
business men	He	him
men	him	he
man	he	man
his help	his	him
he	his	he
he	him	he
him	he	business
his	he	his
him	him	his
man	he	his
men	he	him
man	he	his
he	he	his
he	he	he
he	he	him
he	he	him
he	he	him

he	his	you have no quarrel
his	him	with the alcoholics
him	He	of your organization.
his	his	These juniors are often
man	man	in a difficult position.
him	his	Men under them are
he	man	frequently their friends.
man	he	So, for one reason or
himself	man	another, they cover these
him	his wife	men, hoping matters will
he	he	take a turn for the better.
he	he	They often jeopardize
he	he	their own positions by
he	he	trying to help serious
he	he	drinkers who should
he	he	have been fired long
he	his	ago, or else given an
he	he	opportunity to get well.
man	he	After reading this book,
He	he	a junior executive can
he	he	go to such a man and
his	he	say approximately this,
he	him	“Look here, Ed. Do you
he	his	want to stop drinking or
he	he	not? You put me on the
he	he	spot every time you get
him	he	drunk. It isn’t fair to me
he	him	or the firm. I have been
he	he	learning something about
he	him	alcoholism. If you are
he	he	an alcoholic, you are a
he	him	mighty sick man. You act
he	he	like one. The firm wants
so long as he does not	he	to help you get over it,
bear business tales or	him	and if you are interested,
criticize his associates	he	there is a way out. If you
men	him	take it, your past will be
business	him	forgotten and the fact
office	him	that you went away for
he	There is another thing	treatment will not be
man	you might wish to do.	mentioned. But if you
man	If your organization is	cannot or will not stop
his	a large one, your junior	drinking, I think you
he	executives might be	ought to resign.”
	provided with this book.	Your junior executive
	You might let them know	may not agree with the

contents of our book.	Four Horsemen	husband
He need not, and often	such a sally	men's
should not show it to his	boy	God
alcoholic prospect. But at	his	God
least he will understand	He	men
the problem and will	himself	church
no longer be misled by	he	devil-may-care
ordinary promises. He	He	religious
will be able to take a	he	church
position with such a man	his	Fellowship
which is eminently fair	He	devil-may-care
and square. He will have	he	men
no further reason for	he	man
covering up an alcoholic	He	man's
employee.	He	men and women
man	fellowship	fellowship
he	fellowship	man
he	fellowship	wife
he	fellows	wife
he	You will learn the full	wives
men	meaning of "Love thy	her
men	neighbor as thyself."	mates
man	men	her
fellows got over your	fellowships	mates
drinking	fellowship	her
msn	gay	husband
his	gay	he
him	gay	man
business	men	He
gentleman's	God	gay
deranged men	wife	his
whoopee drinker	God	him
He	fellow	he
man	Fellow	he
He	the church	man
He	God	his
like the devil	God	women
his dying day	He	men
King Alcohol	Creator	him
his	wife	his

He  
his  
wife  
his  
All Powerful Creator  
fellows  
Fellowship  
son  
his  
he  
under one God  
Power of God  
Fellowship  
his  
salesmen  
man  
man  
fellows  
men  
his  
he  
God  
Him  
He  
fellowship  
God  
Him  
man  
Him  
God  
God  
Him  
fellows  
Fellowship  
May God bless you and  
keep you—until then.



*Grant us the serenity to accept the things  
we cannot change, the courage to change  
the things we can, and the wisdom to know  
the difference.*



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