

THAT AIN'T IN THE BIG BOOK

So:

Let's See What Bill W. Had to Say About That!

If you go to enough meetings, you will most likely hear a great many things and think, "Hey – where'd they get *THAT* from – 'cause THAT AIN'T IN THE BOOK! We hear many things said in meetings that just cannot be reconciled with the PROGRAM as outlined in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. And the problem is, if you hear them repeated often enough, they enter our vernacular – they become absorbed into our **spoken** culture. And for the newcomer, that can be a fatal error. Especially if you believe Bill when he wrote "*...unless they follow to the best of (their) ability our suggested Twelve Steps...he almost certainly signs his own death warrant.*"

Since the suggestion made by "The Grapevine" in the late 60's that these new "Open Discussion Meetings" ("OD") might be a good idea there's been a profound change in the content of the message presented in the rooms. This radical shift in our culture away from a historical / traditional focus on the **Program** of Alcoholics Anonymous (*the Steps*) to a sort of "group therapy" where anyone and everyone "shares" whatever might be on their mind has resulted in a significant decline in the success rate of alcoholics finding lasting recovery. Some say this was made worse by the boom in rehabs in the late 70's and early 80's where the focus was on the "sharing" of one's feelings.

I'm not suggesting one become a "language or thought enforcer" at meetings, but when we hear something questionable, ask yourself:

- 1) What's the source of this information, and
- 2) Is it consistent with what it says in our literature?

We must find a tactful, compassionate, non-judgemental, non-critical way to reinject the **PROGRAM** of AA into the **FELLOWSHIP** of AA.

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Excerpt from the "Old Preamble of 1940" a/k/a The "Wilmington Preamble":

"We do not speak for A.A. as a whole and you are free to agree or disagree as you see fit, in fact, it is suggested that you pay no attention to anything which might not be reconciled with what is in the A.A. Big Book. If you don't have a Big Book, it's time you bought one. Read it – Study it – Live with it – Loan It – scatter it – and then learn from it what it means to be an A.A."

http://www.aabibliography.com/old_1940_AA-Preamble.htm

"Yet we can't well content ourselves with the view that all these recovery failures were entirely the fault of the newcomers themselves. Perhaps a great many didn't receive the kind and amount of sponsorship they so dearly needed. We didn't communicate when we might have done so. So we AA's failed them. Perhaps more often than we think, we still make no contact at depth with those suffering the dilemma of no faith."

-----By Bill Wilson : April 1961 Grapevine: "God As We Understand Him: The Dilemma of No Faith."

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions:

Page 39-40: "...sobriety brought about by **the admission of alcoholism** and by **attendance at a few meetings** is very good indeed, but it is bound to be a far cry from **permanent sobriety and a contented, useful life**. That is just where the remaining **Steps of the A.A. program** come in. Nothing short of continuous action upon these as a way of life can bring the much-desired result...

Page 174: "Unless each A.A. member follows to the best of his ability our suggested Twelve Steps to recovery, he almost certainly signs his own death warrant. His **drunkenness and dissolution...result from his personal disobedience to spiritual principles.**"

Page 15: "A.A.'s Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if **practiced as a way of life**, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole."

"The Big Book":

Page 14: Bottom of page: "For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his **spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others**, he could not survive the **certain** trials and low spots ahead."

Page 17: 2: "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...is that we have discovered a **common solution**...THIS is the great news this book carries to those who suffer from alcoholism."

Page 34: 2: "For those who are unable to drink moderately the question is how to stop altogether...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...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."

Page 59: "...**the steps we took...are suggested as (the) program** of recovery."

Page 569 (Appendix 2): bottom of page: "What often takes place in a few months could hardly be accomplished by years of self-discipline."

"We'll love you until you love yourself"

Page 84: 2: "Love and tolerance **of others** is our code."

Page 94: 1: "...you hope that he will try to help other alcoholics when he escapes his own difficulties. Suggest how important it is that he **place the welfare of other people ahead of his own.**"

Page 97: 1: "**Helping others** is the foundation stone of your recovery."

**"You've got to have Faith, You've Got to have Faith,
You've got to have Faith"**

Page 47: 3: "I cannot accept as surely true the many articles of faith which are so plain to him. So it was comforting to learn that we could commence at a **simpler level.**"

"Stay out of relationships for the first year!"

Or

"No Sex for the first year"

Page. 69: 1: "We do not want to be the **arbiter** of anyone's sex conduct."

Page 69: 3: "In meditation, **we ask God** what we should do about each specific matter. **The right answer will come if we want it.**"

Page 69 :4: "God alone can judge our sex situation."

Page 69 -70: "**Counsel with other persons** is often desirable, but we let God be the final judge."

Page 70, third line from top of page: "**We avoid** (hysterical thinking or) **advice.**"

Page 70: 2: "We earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing."

"Don't be so hard on yourself"

Page 74:1: "The rule is we must be hard on ourself (ourselves), but always considerate of others."

"This is a selfish program"

Page 13:4: "Never was I to pray for myself, except when my requests bore on my usefulness to others."

Page 14-15: "For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead."

Page 20:1: "Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers depend upon our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs."

Page 62:2: "Selfishness, self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles" Page 62:3: "So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us."

Page 77, top of page: 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 God and the people about us.**---->page 84:2: **Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness--** >page 85:1: **Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities**

Page 97:1: "Helping others is the foundation stone of your recovery. A kindly act once in a while isn't enough. You have to act the Good Samaritan every day, if need be.

Page 84:2: "Love and tolerance of others is our code."

Page 118:2: "Patience, tolerance, understanding and love are the watchwords."

Page 120:2: "...you will awaken to a new sense of responsibility for others."

Page 97:2: "a/k/a **"THE TWELVE INCONVENIENCES"**: **1.** It may mean the loss of many nights' sleep, **2.** great interference with your pleasures, **3.** interruptions to your business. **4.** It may mean sharing your money and your home, **5.** counseling frantic wives and relatives, **6.** innumerable trips to police courts, sanitariums, hospitals, jails and asylums. **7.** Your telephone may jangle at any time of the day or night. **8.** Your wife may sometimes say she is neglected. **9.** A drunk may smash the furniture in your home or burn a mattress. **10.** You may have to fight with him if he is violent. **11.** Sometimes you will have to call a doctor and administer sedatives under his direction. **12.** Another time you may have to send for the police of an ambulance.

"Just do the next right thing"

Page 61:1 "Is he not, even in his best moments, a producer of **confusion rather than harmony?**"

Page 70:2 "We earnestly pray for the **right ideal**, for **guidance** in each questionable situation, for **sanity**, and for the **strength** to do the right thing."

Page 86:3 "...we may face indecision. We may not be able to determine which course to take. Here we ask God 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.**

Page 87:0: "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."

"You only work one step a year"

Or

"Take your time to work the steps"

"Sometimes a new man is anxious to proceed at once. And you may be tempted to let him do so. This is sometimes a mistake. If he has trouble later, he is likely to say you rushed him." (pg.95:1)

Page 569: 3: "What often takes place **in a few months** could seldom have been accomplished by years of self-discipline."

Page 28: 2: "We...sought the same escape with all the **desperation** of drowning men"

Page 63: 3: "Next we **launched** on a course of vigorous action."

Page 74: 2: "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**"

Page 75: 3: "Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet **for AN HOUR**, carefully reviewing what we have done."

"Don't pick-up no matter what"

Or "Just say no"

Or "Don't drink, even if your ass falls off"

Or "Remember your last drunk"

Or "Play the tape all the way through"

Or "If you don't take the first drink, you can't get drunk"

Or "Think, Think, Think"

Or "Bring the body and the mind will follow"

Page 24:1: **The fact is that most alcoholics...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."**

Page 24: 2: **"The almost certain consequences that follow taking even a glass of beer do not crowd into the mind to deter us. If these thoughts do 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 his hand on a hot stove."**

Page 34:2: **"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."**

Page 43:3: **"The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink...neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a Higher Power."**

"I choose not to drink today"

Page 24: 1: "The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have **lost the power of choice** in drink."

Page 30: 3: "We alcoholics are men and women who have **lost the ability to control** our drinking."

"We go to meetings to dump...to get things off our chest"

Or

"I'm OK – I don't need to go to a meeting today"

(= Why do we go to meetings?)

Page 15: 2 (last two lines): "We meet frequently so that **newcomers** may find the fellowship they seek."

Page 89: 2: "Frequent contact with **newcomers** and with each other is the bright spot of our lives."

Page 159: 3: "Scarce an evening past that someone's home did not shelter a little gathering of men and women, happy in their release...**constantly thinking how they might present their discovery to some newcomer.**"

Page 160: 0: "Aside from fellowship and sociability, **the prime object was to provide a time and place where new people** might bring their problems."

{In **Problems Other Than Alcohol** (IP #35), Bill states that "Sobriety — freedom from alcohol — through the **teaching and practice** of the Twelve Steps is the sole purpose of an A.A. group."

And in **As Bill Sees It**: Page 105 : "Our chief responsibility to the newcomer is an adequate presentation of the program."}

"That's just the way I am. I cannot and never will be able to change that."

Page 76: 1 & 2: "We have emphasized **willingness as being indispensable**. Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable? Can He now take them all—every one? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing.

"When ready, we say something like this: "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen."

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions:

Pages 68-69: "Looking again at those defects we are still unwilling to give up, we ought to **erase the hard-and-fast lines that we have drawn. Perhaps we shall be obliged in some cases still to say, "This I cannot give up yet . . . ,"** but we should not say to ourselves, "This I will never give up! '...At the very least, we shall have to come to grips with some of our worst character defects and take action toward their removal as quickly as we can."

"The moment we say, "No, never!" our minds close against the grace of God. **Delay is dangerous, and rebellion may be fatal.** This is the exact point at which we abandon limited objectives, and move toward God's will for us"

"I haven't had a drink today, so I'm a complete success today."

OR:

"If all I do is stay sober today, then it's been a good day."

Page 19: 1: "The elimination of drinking is but a beginning. A much more important **demonstration of our principles** lies before us in our respective homes, occupations and affairs."

Page 51: 0: "Leaving aside the drink question, **they tell why living was so unsatisfactory...**

Page 52: 2: "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"

Page 82: 3: "Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that **the only thing he needs to do is to keep sober**. Certainly he must keep sober, for there will be no home if he doesn't. But he is yet a long way from making good to the wife or parents whom for years he has so shockingly treated."

Page 82: 4: "**We feel a man is unthinking when he says sobriety is enough.**"

"Keep coming back....it will rub off on you...you'll get it by osmosis."

Page 64:1: "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"

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions:

Page 65; middle of page: ...in no case does He render us white as snow and keep us that way **without our cooperation**.

"Don't talk to the prospect when they're drunk"

Page 90: 3: "Don't deal with him when he is **very** drunk."

"AA is the ONLY way to stay sober"

Page 95:4: "**We have no monopoly** on God; we merely have an approach that worked with us."

Page 144:2: "When the man is presented with this volume **it is best that no one tell him he must abide by its suggestions.** The man must decide for himself."

"I'm powerless over people, places and things"

Page 89: 2: "**You can help when no one else can.** You can secure their confidence when others fail."

Page 89: 3: "...because of your own drinking experience you can be **uniquely** useful to other alcoholics.

Page 132: 3: "We have recovered, and have been **given the power to help others.**"

"I was only harming myself"

Page 18:1: "But not so with the alcoholic illness, for with it there goes annihilation of all the things worthwhile 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** wives and parents—anyone can increase the list."

Page 82:4: "The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his 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."

Page 114:2 : "**The wives and children of such men suffer horribly...**"

Page 122:3: "Years of living with an alcoholic is almost sure to make any wife or child neurotic."

Page 155:1 : "It was the usual situation; home in jeopardy, wife ill, children distracted, bills in arrears and standing damaged."

"The group (or the rooms) are my Higher Power"

Page 24:4: "When this sort of thinking is fully established in an individual with alcoholic tendencies, he has probably placed himself **beyond human aid...**"

Page 34:2: "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.

Note:

see **APPENDIX ONE: "Clarence Snyder : My Higher Power – The Light Bulb"**
and **APPENDIX TWO : "Writing the Big Book: the Creation of A A"** by Bill Schaberg

"Take what you want and leave the rest"

Or

"This is a program of suggestions"

Page 17:3: "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 **brotherly and harmonious action**. This is the great news this book carries to those who suffer from alcoholism."

Page 19:3: "We shall bring to the task our combined experience and knowledge. This should **suggest a useful program** for anyone concerned with a drinking problem."

Page 59:3: "Here are the steps we took, which are **suggested as a program** of recovery"

"Shut up and listen"

Or

"Take the cotton out of your ears and put it in your mouth"

Page 84, Paragraph 2: "Love and **tolerance of others is our code**."

Page 90:1: "When you discover a prospect for Alcoholics Anonymous, **find out all you can about him**."

Page 91:3: "...encourage him to speak of himself. If he wishes to talk, let him do so."

Page 95:1 "If you do stay, let him steer the conversation in any direction he likes."

"You must change people, places and things"

Page 100: 4 – 101: 0: "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 moving pictures 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.

Page 101: 1: "We meet these conditions every day. **An alcoholic who cannot meet them, still has an alcoholic mind**; there is something the matter with his spiritual status.

Page 101: 2: "In our belief any scheme of combating alcoholism which proposes to **shield the sick man from temptation is doomed to failure**.

Page 101: 3: "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 whoopee parties. To a person who has had experience with an alcoholic, this may seem like tempting Providence, but it isn't.

Page 101: 4 – 102: 0: "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**....

Page 102: 2: "**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 **God will keep you unharmed.**"

If you take meds, you're not sober

1. **BILL'S STORY: PAGE 6:2-7:0;** A doctor came with a heavy sedative. Next day found me drinking both gin and sedative. **This combination soon landed me on the rocks.**

2. **The Family Afterward: page 133:2:** 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. **Do not hesitate to take your health problems to such persons.** Most of them give freely of themselves, that their fellows may enjoy sound minds and bodies. Try to remember that though God has wrought miracles among us, we should never belittle a good doctor or psychiatrist. Their services are often indispensable in treating a newcomer and in following his case afterward.

3. **Doctor Bob's Nightmare:** page 176: Most of the time, therefore, I did not take the morning drink which I craved so badly. But **instead would fill up on large doses of sedatives to quiet the jitters**.....page 177: taking large doses of sedatives to make it possible for me to earn more money.

4. **DR BOB & the GOOD OLDTIMERS:** page 32-33:
"He soon "developed two distinct phobias," in his own words: "One was the fear of not sleeping; the other was the fear of running out of liquor. Not being a man of means, I knew that if I did not stay sober enough to earn money, I would run out of liquor."
"This irrefutable logic led him into a squirrel-cage existence - **a 17-year "nightmare."**" Staying sober to earn money to get drunk . . . getting drunk to go to sleep. Then over again-and again!
"Instead of taking the morning drink, which he craved, Dr. Bob turned to what he described as "**large doses of sedatives**" to quiet the jitters, which distressed him terribly. **He contracted what in later years would be called a pill problem, or dual addiction.**
"Whenever Bob did yield to the craving for the morning drink instead, there was a major disaster. First, he was unfit for work within a few hours. Second, he lost his usual skill in smuggling home enough liquor to put him to sleep. This led to a night of "futile tossing around in bed followed by a morning of unbearable jitters."
"His usual pattern was to **stay dry but well sedated every day** until four o'clock."

"There are no musts in A.A."

(141)

(Remember: There are many ways to say "must")

THE DOCTOR'S OPINION

1. Page xxv: Convincing testimony *must* surely come from medical men who have had experience with the sufferings of our members and have witnessed our return to health.
2. page xxv: As part of his rehabilitation he commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing on them that they *must* do likewise with still others.
3. page xxvi: In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture *must* believe -- that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind.
4. Page xxvi: More often than not, it is *imperative* that a man's brain be cleared before he is approached
5. page xxviii: The message which can interest and hold these alcoholic people *must* have depth and weight.
6. page xxviii: In nearly all cases, their ideals *must* be grounded in a power greater than themselves, if they are to re-create their lives.
7. Page xxix: ...the only effort *necessary* being ...
8. Page xxix: ...that *required* to follow a few simple rules.
9. page xxix: I *must* stop, but I cannot!
10. page xxix: You *must* help me!
11. page xxix: Faced with this problem, if a doctor is honest with himself, he *must* sometimes feel his own inadequacy.

12. Page xxix: One feels that something more than human power *is needed* to...
13. Page xxix:produce the *essential* psychic change.
14. page xxix: 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.

CHAPTER 1 BILL'S STORY

15. page 5:1: Liquor ceased to be a luxury; it became a *necessity*.
16. page 5:1: A tumbler full of gin followed by half a dozen bottles of beer would be *required* if I were to eat any breakfast.
17. page 10:0: Certainly I was interested. I *had to* be for I was hopeless.
18. page 10:3: I simply *had to* believe in a Spirit of the Universe...
19. page 14: Simple, but not easy; a price *had to* be paid
20. page 14: I *must* turn in all things to the Father of Light who presides over us all.
21. page 14: My friend emphasized the *absolute necessity* of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs.
22. page 14: Particularly was it *imperative* to work with others...
23. page 16: Faith *has to* work twenty-four hours a day...

CHAPTER 2 THERE IS A SOLUTION

24. page 19: *Of necessity* there will have to be discussion of matters medical, psychiatric, social and religious.
25. page 20:0: Our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers *depend upon* our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs.

26. page 20: His will power **must** be weak.
27. page 25:1: Almost none of us liked the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process **requires** for its successful consummation.
28. page 29: Our hope is that many alcoholic men and women, 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

29. page 30:2: We learned that **we had to** fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics.
30.The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be **has to be** smashed.
31. page 33: 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.
32. page 42:1: I **had to** concede both propositions.
33. page 43: His defense **must** come from a Higher Power.

CHAPTER 4 WE AGNOSTICS

34. page 44:3: But after a while we **had to** face the fact that.....
35. page 44:3: ... we **must** find a spiritual basis of life -- or else.
36. page 45:1: We **had to** find a power by which we could live...
37. page 45:1: ...and it **had to** be a Power greater than ourselves.
38. Page 47:1: **Do not let** any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you.

39. page 47:1: ...but if we wished to grow, *we had to* begin somewhere.
40. Page 47:2 We *needed to* ask ourselves but one short question.
41. page 48:0: This sort of thinking *had to be* abandoned.
42. page 50:4: This happened soon after they wholeheartedly met a few simple *requirements*.
43. Page 52:2: We *had to* ask ourselves why we shouldn't apply to our human problems the same readiness to change our point of view.
44. page 52:3: We *had to* stop doubting the power of God.
45. page 53:2: *We had to* fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing.
46. Page 55:3: Sometimes we *had to* search fearlessly...

CHAPTER 5 HOW IT WORKS

47. Page 60:4: The first *requirement* is that we be convinced...
48. page 62:2: Above everything, we alcoholics *must* be rid of this selfishness.
49. page 62:2: We *must*, or it kills us!
50. page 62:2: We *had to* have God's help.
51. page 62:3: First of all, we *had to* quit playing God
52. page 64:0: So *we had to* get down to causes and conditions.
53. page 66:2: If we were to live, *we had to* be free of anger.
54. page 66:3: We saw that these resentments *must* be mastered, but how?
55. page 69:3: Whatever our ideal turns out to be, we *must* be willing to grow toward it.

56. page 69:3: 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.

CHAPTER 6 INTO ACTION

57. page 72:1: This **requires** action on our part...

58. page 73:0: ...in the sense we find it **necessary** until someone else all their life story.

59. page 73:4: We **must** be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world.

60. page 74:0: Those of us who belong to a religious denomination which requires confession **must**, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty is to receive it.

61. page 74:1: The rule is we **must** be hard on ourself, but always considerate of others.

62. page 74:2: Notwithstanding the **great necessity** for discussing ourselves with someone.....

63. Page 74:2: It is important that he be able to keep a confidence...

64. page 75:0: But we **must** not use this as a mere excuse to postpone.

65. Page 75:1; We explain to our partner what we are about to do and why **we have to** do it.

66. page 76:1: We have emphasized willingness as being **indispensable**.

67. page 77:2: **Under no condition** do we criticize such a person or argue.

68. page 78:2: 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.

69. Page 79:2: ...but we are willing. We **have to** be.

70. page 79:1: We **must** not shrink..

71. page 80:1: *If we obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked God to help and the drastic step is indicated we **must** not shrink.*
72. page 81:0: *In fairness we **must** say that she may understand, but what are we going to do about a thing like that?*
73. Page 81:1: *Whatever the situation, we usually **have to** do something about it.*
74. page 82:2: *Certainly he **must** keep sober, for there will be no home if he doesn't.*
75. page 83:1: *We **must** take the lead.*
76. Page 83:2: *The spiritual life is not a theory. **We have to** live it.*
77. page 83:2: *We **must** remember that ten or twenty years of drunkenness would make a skeptic out of anyone.*
78. page 85:1: *Every day is a day when we **must** carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities.*
79. page 85:1: *: These are the thoughts which **must** go with us constantly.*
80. page 85:2: *But we **must** go further and that means more action.*
81. page 86:1: *But we **must** be careful not to drift into worry, remorse or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness to others.*
82. Page 88:2: ***So we let God** discipline us in the simple way we have just outlined.*

CHAPTER 7 WORKING WITH OTHERS

83. page 89:2: *To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends -- this is an experience you **must** not miss.*
84. page 90:4: *The family **must** decide these things.*
85. page 93:2: *To be vital, faith **must** be accompanied by self sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action.*

86. page 95:1: *Never* talk down to an alcoholic...
87. page 95:3: After doing that, he *must* decide for himself whether he wants to go on.
88. page 95:3: If he is to find God, the desire *must* come from within him.
89. page 97:1: *Never* avoid these responsibilities.
90. page 97:2: *You have to* act the Good Samaritan every day...
91. page 97:1: Occasionally you will *have to* meet such conditions.
92. page 99:0: In many homes this is a difficult thing to do, but it *must* be done if any results are to be expected.
93. page 99:1: But we *must* try to repair the damage immediately lest we pay the penalty by a spree.
94. page 99:2: If their old relationship is to be resumed it *must* be on a better basis, since the former did not work.
95. page 100:1: Both you and the new man *must* walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress.
96. page 102:0: But if you are shaky, *you had better* work with another alcoholic instead.
97. page 102:3: *We never argue* this question.
98. page 103:1: We are careful *never* to show intolerance or hatred of drinking as an institution.
99. page 103:3: Besides, we have stopped fighting anybody or anything. *We have to!*

CHAPTER 8 TO WIVES

100. Page 111:1: Patience and good temper are *most necessary*.

101. *page 111:2 Our next thought is that you should never tell him what he **must** do about his drinking.*
102. *page 113:1: Wait until repeated stumbling convinces him he **must** act, for the more you hurry him the longer his recovery will be delayed.*
103. *page 114:3: But sometimes you **must** start life anew.*
104. *page 115:1: But you **must** be on guard not to embarrass or harm your husband.*
105. *page 115:2: You will no longer be self-conscious or feel that you **must** apologize as though your husband were a weak character.*
106. *page 117:3: Often you **must** carry the burden of avoiding them or keeping them under control.*
107. *page 117:3: **Never forget** that resentment is a deadly hazard to an alcoholic.*
108. *page 118:2: Yet you **must** not expect too much.*
109. *page 118:2: Live and let live is **the rule**.*
110. *page 120:1: Your husband will see at once that he **must** redouble his spiritual activities if he expects to survive.*
111. *page 120:3: **Never, never** try to arrange a man's life....*

CHAPTER 9 THE FAMILY AFTERWARD

112. *page 127:0: The family **must** realize that dad, though marvelously improved, is still convalescing.*
113. *page 127:1 But he **must** see the danger of over-concentration on financial success.*
114. *page 127:2: We know there are difficult wives and families, but the man who is getting over alcoholism **must** remember he did much to make them so.*

115. Page 129:1:...a spiritual life which does not include his family *obligations* may not be so perfect after all.
116. page 130:1: That is where our fellow travelers are, and that is where our work *must* be done.
117. page 131:2: Father will *necessarily* spend much time with other alcoholics....
118. Page 131:2...but this activity *should* be balanced.
119. page132:1: We *absolutely insist* on enjoying life.
120. Page 133:2: Their services are often *indispensable*...
121. page 135:1: Whether the family goes on a spiritual basis or not, the alcoholic member *has to* if he would recover.
122. Page 135:1: The others *must* be convinced of his new status beyond the shadow of a doubt.

CHAPTER 10 TO EMPLOYERS

123. page 141:4: State that you know about his drinking, and that it *must* stop.
124. page 143:0: ...a certain amount of physical treatment is desirable, even *imperative*.
125. page 143:1: Though you are providing him with the best possible medical attention, he should understand that he *must* undergo a change of heart.
126. Page 144:2: When the man is presented with this volume it is best that no one tell him he *must* abide by its suggestions.
127. Page 146:2: Being on a radically different basis of life, he *will never* take advantage of the situation.
128. Page 146:2: For he knows he *must* be honest if he would live at all.

CHAPTER 11 A VISION FOR YOU

129. page 152:1: "...I know I **must** get along without liquor, but how can I?..."
130. page 153:2: They will approach still other sick ones and fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous may spring up in each city and hamlet, havens for those who **must** find a way out.
131. page 154:4: There **must** be many such in this town.
132. page 155:2: A spiritual experience, he conceded, was **absolutely necessary**, but the price seemed high upon the basis suggested.
133. page 155:3: He saw that he would **have to** face.....
134. page 156:3: Both saw that they **must** keep spiritually active.
135. Page 158:5: ...who now felt they **had to** give to others...
136. page 159:2: Though they knew they **must** help other alcoholics if they would remain sober, that motive became secondary.
137. page 164:1: God will determine that, so you **must** remember that your real reliance is always upon Him.

APPENDIX II....SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

138. page 569:2: Yet it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, **must** be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals.
139. page 569:3: Though it was not our intention to create such an impression, many alcoholics have nevertheless concluded that in order to recover they **must** acquire an immediate and overwhelming "God-consciousness" followed at once by a vast change in feeling and outlook.
140. Page 570:3: Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are the **essentials** of recovery.
141. Page 570:3: But these are **indispensable**.

"I will always be recovering, never recovered....."

Or **"We never say recovered"** (35)

1. *The Story of How **More Than One Hundred Men** have Recovered from Alcoholism (Title Page/First Edition/**First** Printing ; changed to "Thousands of men and women..." /First Edition / **Ninth** Printing)*
2. *WE, OF Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and woman who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.(Pg. XIII)*
3. *To show other alcoholics PRECISELY HOW WE HAVE RECOVERED is the main purpose of this book. (Pg. XIII)*
4. *Alcoholics Anonymous has mushroomed into nearly 6,000 groups whose membership is far above 150,000 recovered alcoholics. (Pg. XV)*
5. *Their very first case, a desperate one, recovered immediately and became A.A. number three. (Pg. XVIII)*
6. *This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered. (Pg. XXV)*
7. *Nearly all have recovered. They have solved the drink problem. (Pg. 17:1)*
8. *Many could recover if they had the opportunity we have enjoyed. (Pg. 19:2)*
9. *...we have recovered from a hopeless condition of mind and body. (Pg. 20:1)*
10. *When therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem has been solved... (pg 25:1)*
11. *Further on, clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered. (Pg. 29)*
12. *many of us would have recovered long ago. (Pg 44-45)*
13. *Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. (Pg. 58:0)*

14. *There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but **many of them do recover** if they have the capacity to be honest. (Pg. 58:0)*
15. *To watch people **recover**, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends - this is an experience you must not miss. (Pg. 89:1)*
16. *Perhaps you are not acquainted with any drinkers **who want to recover**. You can easily find some by asking a few doctors, ministers, priests or hospitals. (Pg. 89:2)*
17. *If he says yes, then his attention should be drawn to you as a person who has **recovered**. (Pg. 90)*
18. *But insist that if he is severely afflicted, there may be little chance he can **recover** by himself. (Pg. 92:1)*
19. *We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a man who cannot or will not work with you. If you leave such a person alone, he may soon become convinced that he cannot **recover** by himself. (Pg. 96:1)*
20. *he might have deprived many others, who have since **recovered** (Pg. 96:1)*
21. *Should they accept and practice spiritual principles, there is a much better chance that the head of the family will **recover**. (Pg. 97:3)*
22. *Let no alcoholic say he cannot **recover** unless he has his family back. (Pg. 99:3)*
23. *He knows that thousands of men, much like himself, have **recovered**. (Pg. 113:1)*
24. *Our women folk have suggested certain attitudes a wife may take with the husband who is **recovering**. (Pg. 122:0)*
25. *We have **recovered**, and have been given the power to help others. (Pg. 132:2)*
26. *We, who have **recovered** from serious drinking, are miracles of mental health. (Pg. 133:1)*

27. *Whether the family goes on a spiritual basis or not, the alcoholic member has to if he would **recover**. (Pg. 135:1)*
28. *After satisfying yourself that your man wants to **recover** and that he will go to any extreme to do so, you may suggest a definite course of action. (Pg. 142:4)*
29. *An alcoholic who **has recovered**... (Pg. 143:3)*
30. *If he is, and is still trying **to recover**, he will tell you about it even if it means the loss of his job. (Pg. 146:3)*
31. *The right kind of man, the kind who **recovers**, will not want this sort of thing. (Pg. 149:3)*
32. *He has helped other men **recover**, and is a power in the church from which he was long absent. (Pg. 158:4)*
33. *Understanding our work, he can do this with an eye to selecting those who are willing and able to **recover** on a spiritual basis. (Pg. 162:1)*
34. *When a few men in this city have found 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 his opportunity to **recover** - if he can and will. (Pg. 163:4>164:0)*
35. *Most emphatically we wish to say that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience **can recover**, provided he does not close his mind to all spiritual concepts. (Appendix II Spiritual Experience)*

**"This is a "Just For Today" Program – there's no such thing as
"Permanent Sobriety"**

1. Page xvi / Forward to Second Edition / Fourth Edition: "He sobered, never to drink again....." (third line from bottom of page)
2. Page xvii / Forward to Second Edition / Fourth Edition: "...strenuous work, one alcoholic with another, was vital to permanent recovery."
3. Page xvii / Forward to Second Edition / Fourth Edition: "...and became A.A. number three. He never had another drink."
4. Page 13:1: "I was separated from alcohol for the last time."
5. Page 13:2: "I have not had a drink since". (Dec. 11, 1934)
6. Page 90:3: "Then let his family or a friend to ask him if he wants to quit for good and if he would go to any extreme to do so."
7. Page 116:1: "It may convince your husband he wants to stop drinking forever."
8. Page 156:2: "He has not had a drink since."
9. Page 158:4: That was June 1935. He never drank again.

"BONUS" MENTION: Page 169: *Part 1 : Pioneers of A.A.* / Fourth Edition: "They bear witness that release from alcoholism can really be permanent."

"If they want it bad enough, they'll ask ME for help...

...or for my phone number"

(30)

Among the many points Bill Wilson makes over and over in the Big Book is that it is the *responsibility*, the *obligation* of those who are living in the solution as the result of the steps to **approach** the newcomer or someone who is struggling or suffering. The attitude found in today's recovery culture of "if they want it bad enough, they'll come and ask me for help" is nowhere to be found in the Big Book. We're not there "to be available" – but "**TO APPROACH**" those in need.

Or, how about giving phone numbers to newcomers without taking theirs? How about making the first contact yourself? Clearly we expect too much from the newcomer. How many of us when new were able to pick up the phone and talk to a total stranger about our problems, fears or God?

So, what follows is a partial list of references to "**making the approach.**"

1. "More often than not, it is imperative that a man's brain be cleared before he is **approached**, as he has then a better chance of understanding and accepting what we have to offer." (Doctor's Opinion, pg. xxiv)
2. "**He had come** to pass his experience along to me" (Bill's Story, pg. 9:7)
3. "My schoolmate **visited me**..." (Bill's Story 13:3)
4. "That the man who is making the **approach** has had the same difficulty, that he obviously knows what he is talking about" (There Is A Solution, Pg. 18:5)
5. "After such an **approach** many take up their beds and walk again." (There Is A Solution, Pg. 19:0)
6. "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." (There Is A Solution, Pg. 25:1)
7. "Two of the members of Alcoholics Anonymous **came to see me**." (More About Alcoholism, pg. 42:1)
8. "Step 12.....we tried to **carry this message**..." (How It Works, 60:0)
9. "This is our twelfth suggestion: **Carry this message** to other alcoholics!" (Working With Others pg. 89:1)

10. "You can easily **find some** by asking a few doctors, ministers, priests or hospitals." (Working With Others pg. 89:1)
11. "When you **discover a prospect** for Alcoholics Anonymous...(Working With Others, pg 90:1)
12. "You need this information to put yourself in his place, to see how you would like him to **approach** you if the tables were turned." (Working With Others pg. 90:2)
13. '**Approach** through a doctor or an institution is a better bet.' (Working With Others pg. 91:1)
14. When your man is better, the doctor might suggest **a visit** from you. (Working With Others pg. 91:2)
15. **Call on him** while he is still jittery. (Working With Others pg. 91:2)
16. "...we merely have an **approach** that worked for us" (Working With Others, pg 95:4)
17. "**Search out** another alcoholic and try again." (Working With Others pg 96:1)
18. "...**find someone** desperate enough to accept with eagerness what you offer." (Working With Others, pg 96:1)
19. Your job now is to **be at the place** where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others...(Working With Others pg. 102:2)
20. ...so never hesitate to **go anywhere** if you can be helpful. (Working With Others pg. 102:2)
21. You should not hesitate to **visit** the most sordid spot on earth on such an errand. (Working With Others pg. 102:2)
22. When we see a man sinking into the mire that is alcoholism, **we give him first aid**...(The Family Afterwards Pg. 132:1)
23. ...and **place what we have** at his disposal. (The Family Afterwards Pg. 132:1)

24. Following his discharge, **we contacted him.** (To Employers 139:1)
25. We think this method of **approach** will accomplish several things. (To Employers 148:3)
26. The other day an **approach** was made to the vice president of a large industrial concern. He remarked: "I'm glad you fellows got over your drinking." (To Employers 148:4)
27. They will **approach** still other sick ones and fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous may spring up in each city and hamlet (A Vision For You pg. 153:2)
28. In the chapter "Working With Others" you gathered an idea of how we **approach** and aid others to health. (A Vision For You pg. 153:3)
29. They were willing, by day or night, to place a new man in the hospital **and visit him** afterward.
30. Every few days this doctor suggests our **approach** to one of his patients. (A Vision For You pg. 162:1)

Food for thought:

"You can only keep what you have by giving it away."

Throughout this text book, Bill has been pounding home the unparalleled importance of working with others (NOTE: *what follows is a PARTIAL LIST*):

Pg. 14:6 to 15:0: "For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life **through work and self-sacrifice for others**, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead."

Pg. 70:2: "If (something) is very troublesome, we throw ourselves the harder into **helping others**. We think of **their needs and work for them**."

Pg. 76:2: "I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which **stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows**."

Pg. 77:0: "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of **maximum service to God and the people about us**."

Pg. 89:1: "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as **intensive work with other alcoholics**."

Pg. 97:1: "**Helping others** is the foundation stone of your recovery."

Pg. 102:0: "...if you're shaky, **you had better work with another alcoholic instead**."

Pg. 102:2: "Your job now is to be at the place where **you may be of maximum helpfulness to others**..."

But then, about five pages from the end of Bill's summarization of the book, he seems to reverse himself – or does he???

Page 159:2: 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.**

A lofty aspiration or a realistic objective???

APPENDIX ONE : The Light Bulb

*'My Higher Power The Light Bulb' was copied from the old web page of the "Recover Or Die" group that used to meet in Washingtonville, New York, not far from Cornwall, New York. What follows is courtesy of Mitchell Klein, author of "**How It Worked: the Story of Clarence H. Snyder And the Early Days of Alcoholics Anonymous in Cleveland, Ohio**"*

My Higher Power - The Light Bulb

By Clarence H. Snyder

(Clarence started AA group #3 in Cleveland & in the beginning had a higher recovery rate than Bill & Dr. Bob combined. His story, "Home Brewmeister," can be found on page 297 of the Big Book.)

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

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

This is no easy task. A vast array of difficulties presents themselves to thwart the new person on his journey. The foremost adversary, of course, is the illness itself. It seems that many, many alcoholics have a very fierce, emotionally charged resistance to accepting any dependence upon a Power, which, to them, may seem an abstract & remotely distant concept. This internal resistance is most effectively broken down by the potential recoveree's initial desperation. (It seems such a shame that today's AA actually encourages the newcomer to avoid reaping the blessings of that

desperation.) If intense enough & deep enough, this emotional "bottom" will be the very propellant the prospect needs to thrust him into the recovery process offered by AA through its 12 Steps.

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

One of the most powerful & hope-filled statements to be found in the entire text of Alcoholics Anonymous can be found on page 25. "The great fact is just this, & nothing less: That we have had deep & effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows & toward God's universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts & lives in a way that is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do for ourselves." Are we, today, so far removed from our founder's results of our recovery program that these words are nothing more than a "nice thought" or an exaggeration due to artificially elated emotions? If so, we "obviously cannot transmit something we don't have." We cannot share awareness we don't have. Cannot give guidance we have never gotten. We cannot share a vision of God we have never seen. Our lack, thereby, becomes the newcomer's & he may die because of it! Our resistance becomes his license. In his liquor befogged mind he does not seek & experience God but begins to "create" one. It's no wonder his dryness becomes so barren that in a short while he returns to drink. His "Higher Power" was a light bulb! (No joke. We have heard this comment voiced more than once & not only by a newcomer!) Or perhaps this power greater than himself was a chair, or a wall, or even a mere mortal sponsor. A quick glance at the top of page 93 of the "Big Book" makes instantly clear a very important qualification in the concept of "...as you understand Him," & that is: "He can choose any conception he likes, PROVIDED IT MAKES SENSE TO HIM."

Power greater than himself - a light bulb? A simple flick of a switch turns off that power. A wall? Not so powerful when confronted with a bulldozer. A chair? An ax can make quick kindling of that higher power. A sponsor then?

If he fails to perfect his spiritual life, his old foe alcohol is sure to reclaim him. So he won't do very well as a greater power. How about a whole group? Possibly for someone else, but not for us. If one person is powerless over alcohol, & another, we would have a group of people who are powerless over alcohol. We do not have a group who ARE POWERFUL over alcohol. Yet they do not drink! They have gained access to something more powerful than alcohol.

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

It is our most earnest desire that no one reading this feel that we are trying to impose any presentation of God of His nature on anyone. Our real hope is that a reader may be jolted from a position of complacency or spiritual evasion & get about the business of recovery.

Excerpt from: "[Writing the Big Book : The Creation of
A.A.](#)"

By William H. Schaberg (pgs. 279 – 281)

A Power Greater Than Ourselves

The essence of the next chapter Bill wrote is neatly captured in the later wording of the Second Step: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity;" this is the only way the alcoholic can overcome the insanity of the first drink. But rather than just bluntly stating the fact that one hundred men had come to believe and thereby been able to stop drinking, Wilson needed to present some persuasive arguments to convince an active alcoholic that he could and should join them in their beliefs about the power of God.

Bill had told Bob Smith he didn't much care for the first draft of "We Agnostics," claiming he thought it was "too preachy" and he felt that it was "rather disconnected." Given his almost impossible task, this is completely understandable; how could he even begin to make an effective argument for the necessary belief in God *without* sounding like a Sunday school preacher? No wonder he suggested to Bob that perhaps it "might better be done... in the form of a dialogue between one of our former agnostics and a tough minded bird lying in a hospital bed."ⁱ Presenting arguments for the existence of God as part of a bedside conversation would have sounded much less like a church sermon and might have proved more appealing to non-believers, but as far as we know, Bill never went down that more literary road.

Whatever he wrote, Wilson knew he needed to do everything in his power to avoid the reaction expected from an alcoholic who had just been told that God was a necessary part in this solution: "Oh, so that's what it is, I'm so disappointed, I had begun to think [you] fellows knew what [you] were talking about."ⁱⁱ Above all else, Bill wanted the reader to keep an open mind and to engage in an exploration of what he called "the God idea." His worst fear was that the agnostic or atheist would reach this point in the book and then just slam it shut, effectively closing off any further discussion.

Wilson tried to make this inclusive point clear from the very beginning by choosing a collegial title of "We Agnostics" for this chapter. He could have just as easily called it "The Agnostic" or "You Agnostics" or even something like "The Agnostic's Dilemma" – all of which would have immediately set up a confrontational scenario. Instead, Bill quickly makes two specific reference to the "We" of his title by noting that originally about half of the Fellowship had been strangers to any sort of spiritual experience and, more specifically, that "something like fifty of us thought we were atheists or agnostics" when first introduced to the Fellowship.ⁱⁱⁱ But even these committed non-believers soon realized the choice they faced was to either "be doomed to an alcoholic hell or be 'saved.'" These two harsh options, Wilson admits, are not always easy to face, but however much agnostic members may have tried to avoid the God issue, "after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life – or else" – the "or else" being a return to drinking and a life that could only be characterized as an alcoholic hell.

Having hopefully established some rapport with the non-believing reader, Bill now referred back to the drinker's lack of power regarding the first drink, summing up the essence of his position – and the critical challenge presently facing the atheist or agnostic – in eight short sentences:

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 God.

God as We Understand Him

When writing this chapter Bill was trying to be as open-ended as possible in his talk about the essential "spiritual experience" and the need for a "spiritual basis of life", and he emphasized that liberal approach throughout by using phrases like "A Power Greater Than Ourselves" and "your own conception of God" and even "God, as you understand Him." But many contemporary A.A. readers completely miss the point Wilson was trying to make in "We Agnostics" because they read the chapter from a 21st-century perspective, one which incorporates the tremendous liberalization the phrase "God as we understand Him" has gone through during A.A.'s subsequent history and development. This later and much greater flexibility regarding "God as we understand Him" allows some alcoholics to understand God as a "Group Of Drunks", or "Good Orderly Direction", or the

“Gift Of Desperation”, or even the “Great Out Doors.” While this widely expanded approach has been a boon to the growing membership of Alcoholics Anonymous, it goes far beyond anything Bill Wilson ever intended when he wrote “We Agnostics” in September of 1938.

Today’s more liberal contemporary understandings of “God as we understand Him” are put forward under the misconception that this level of freedom of choice was exactly what Bill Wilson meant when he used those open-ended phrases in “We Agnostics.” It wasn’t. Instead, Bill had two fundamental and very restrictive presumptions that informed all of his writing in this chapter, presumptions that 21st-century A.A. readers so easily fail to notice because of their own current expectations of the text.

Spiritual Means Belief in a Personal God

The first of these is Wilson’s belief in the complementary equations that “spiritual = God” and “God = spiritual.” Bill makes it clear in the first six paragraphs of this chapter that there is absolutely no avenue for accessing the spiritual other than through a belief in God. This strict equivalency rejects out-of-hand every other avenue for having a spiritual experience along with any alternate path for discovering a spiritual basis for life. While such an exclusive position is far from today’s more liberal attitudes in A.A., it is completely consistent with Bill Wilson’s upbringing, with the beliefs and values of the earliest members of the Fellowship, and is perfectly aligned with 1930s American culture (which was far more religious than it is today). More open conceptions of “God” and “spiritual” that were adopted later must therefore be firmly set aside in order to reach a proper understanding of what Wilson was actually saying when he first wrote this chapter.

Bill’s second fundamental presumption lies buried within his claim that readers can believe in any conception of God they might like. What is understood in that claim, but never explicitly stated, is that this new belief must be in any *providential* God you want to believe in – a God to whom you can pray, with whom you can make conscious contact, and on whom you can absolutely rely for the help needed to avoid the first drink. Bill offers an open-ended invitation for alcoholics to believe in “a Supreme Being” or “an All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence” (along with a number of other Impressively Capitalized Titles), but never, for instance, does he offer as an object of belief the God of the Deists – who believe He created the universe and then removed Himself from the realm of human affairs – or any of the other less involved, less accessible conceptions of divinity that have been suggested over the millennia by religious teachers, mystics, and philosophers.

If you want to get sober, you must align yourself with a *personal* God with whom you can have a *personal* relationship. There is no other option.¹ Again, Bill was not being duplicitous here; this fundamental assumption was not only what had saved his own life², it was the foundational, common currency of belief throughout the Fellowship at that time as well as for religious people across the country. Wilson didn't feel he needed to be explicit about this point when talking about "the God idea;" it was simply a given in the context of that time and place and, in addition, completely obvious from the amount of direct help the alcoholic would need from this Supreme Being. If you want to stop drinking, you must find a spiritual basis of life, and that spiritual basis can only be found by believing in a Supreme Being with whom you can establish a personal relationship.

ⁱ William G. Wilson to Dr. R. Smith, September 27, 1938 (GSO Box 59, Folder B[1], Document 1938-153).

ⁱⁱ "There Is A Solution" (GSO, Box 59, 1938, Folder B, First Two Chapters of the Proposed Book; Trust Indenture, Documents 1938-53 to 1938-75, p. 10).

ⁱⁱⁱ All quotes in this section from "We Agnostics" can be found in *The Book That Started It All*, pp. 52-59.

¹ This was stated much more explicitly in a Chicago pamphlet written in 1940 or 1941 (the words "spiritual experience" still appear in their version of the 12th Step): "All that is required is a recognition of a Supreme Being which would help us were He sincerely petitioned." (available online at <http://silkworth.net/aahistory/impressions.html> - retrieved September 28, 2015).

² See, for instance, the mid-1938 version of "Bill's Story:" "In a power greater than myself I had always believed. I had often pondered these things. I was not an atheist... 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, which knew neither time nor limitation. But that was as far as I had gone. With preachers, and the world's religions, I parted right there. When they talked of a God personal to me, which was love, superhuman strength and direction, I became irritated, and my mind snapped shut against such theory... But my friend sat before me, and he made the point blank declaration that God had done for him what he could not do for himself... In effect he had been raised from the dead; suddenly taken from the scrap-heap to a level of life better than the best he had ever known... That floored me. It began to look as though religious 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..." (GSO, Box 59, 1938, Folder B, First Two Chapters of the Proposed Book; Trust Indenture, Documents 1938-53 to 1938-75, p. 20).

² All quotes in this section from "We Agnostics" can be found in *The Book That Started It All*, pp. 52-59.