

Why I Should Study the Big Book
What is HEARD in meetings compared to the PROGRAM
Of Alcoholics Anonymous

Since the suggestion made by “The Grapevine” in the late 60’s that “Discussion” meetings might be a good idea, there has been a change in the content of the meetings from ones that focused on the Program of Alcoholics Anonymous to “group therapy” where anyone and everyone is privileged to speak on whatever might be on their mind. The result of this has been a severe decline in the success rate of alcoholics finding lasting recovery.

While there is a tendency to believe that “we know so much more today,” which we do in almost every area of our society, that appears not to be true where recovery from alcoholism is concerned. The truth is that “alcoholism” has not changed since the beginning of recorded history. God certainly has not changed since 1939. And, nobody has demonstrated a more successful program of recovery than the action of the Twelve Steps Program of Alcoholics Anonymous, which is so clearly outlined in the book, “ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS”. So, what’s new?

Before taking a look at what is so often heard in meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, let’s examine some of the statements made by the Authors of this Basic Text. For example:

“We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book.” AA, pg. xiii

(Note: **PRECISELY** – “Exactly or sharply defined or stated. Minutely exact; not varying in the slightest degree from truth.” Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary – circa 1936.)

So, let’s examine the TRUTH!

“ If you are an alcoholic who wants to get over it, you may 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.” AA, pg. 20

“Lack of power 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 is exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself that will solve your problem.” AA, pg. 45

“Further on, clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered.” AA, pg. 29

There is a Spiritual Axiom that applies to recovery from alcoholism:

“Noah, an amateur, with God’s guidance, built the Ark. Professionals, with all their smarts, built the Titanic.”

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Now, let's review what is so often "Heard" in the meetings.

Heard – "Just keep coming back. You'll be OK."

That, of course, is a lie. Rigorous honesty?

BB – *"Here are the steps we took which are suggested as a program of recovery."*

Heard - "Don't drink and go to meetings."

"Don't drink" are words you would expect to hear from a non-alcoholic. If a person knew how to "Don't drink," they would have no reason to go to meetings.

Heard - "Don't drink, no matter what."

Real alcoholics drink, no matter what.

Heard - "Don't drink even if your ass falls off." (How ridiculous!)

Don't you think an untreated alcoholic would reach for a drink if their "ass started falling off?"

BB – *"Many of us felt 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." AA, pg. 34*

Heard – "I have a choice of whether or not I take a drink today."

Then why did they come to Alcoholics Anonymous?

"Think before you drink."

"Just think the drink through."

BB – *"The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink." AA, pg. 24*

"We are without defense against the first drink." AA, pg. 24

"Once more: The alcoholic at certain times has no effective defense against the first drink." AA, pg. 43

Heard - "There is no such thing as a recovered alcoholic."

Who were the Authors of the Basic Text for Alcoholics Anonymous?

BB – *"The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism." AA, Title Page*

"We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, know thousands of men and women who were once just as hopeless as Bill. Nearly all have recovered. They have solved the drink problem." AA, pg. 17

(Note: The word "Recovered" is used ten (10) times in the Basic Text by "Recovered" alcoholics.)

Heard – "Don't rush into taking the steps. Take your time."

BB – *"On your first visit tell him (your prospect) about the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. If he shows interest, lend him your copy of this book." AA, pg. 94*

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“Suppose now you are making your second visit to a man. He has read this volume and says he is prepared to go through with the Twelve Steps of the program of recovery.”

AA, pg. 96

“We, in our turn, sought the same escape with all the desperation of drowning men.”

AA, pg. 28

If the newcomer doesn't rush into taking the steps, they will most likely rush into a bar or liquor store.

Heard – “The gift of sobriety.”

Gift – a present that is given, not paid for.

BB – *“Simple, but not easy; a price had to be paid.”* AA, pg. 14

Heard – “My sponsee(s).”

BB – *“That the man who is making the approach has had the same difficulty, that he obviously knows what he is talking about, that his whole deportment shouts at the new “prospect” that he is a man with a real answer, that he has no attitude of Holier Than Thou, nothing whatever except the sincere desire to be helpful; that there are no fees to pay, axes to grind, no people to please (except your Sponsor), no lectures to be endured—these are the conditions we have found most effective.”* AA, pgs. 18 – 19

“Continue to speak of alcoholism as an illness, a fatal malady. Talk about the conditions of body and mind that accompany it. Keep his attention focused mainly on your personal experience. Explain that many are doomed who never realize 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 him about the hopelessness of alcoholism because you offer a solution. You will soon have your “friend” admitting he has many, if not all, of the traits of the alcoholic. If his own doctor is willing to tell him that he is alcoholic, so much the better. Even though your “protégé” may not have entirely admitted his condition, he has become very curious to know how you got well.” AA, pgs. 92 & 93

The word “friend” is used many times in the Basic Text.

The word “prospect” is used eleven (11) times in the Basic Text.

The word “protégé” is used one (1) time in the Basic Text.

The word “sponsee” cannot be found in the Basic Text. Nor can we find the word “sponsoree.” As a matter of fact, neither can they be found in current dictionaries.

Heard – “Who keeps us clean and sober?”

BB – *“And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone—even alcohol. For by this time sanity has returned.”* AA, pg. 84

“Even so has God restored us all to our right minds.” AA, pg. 57

Yes, God will restore us to sanity where alcohol is concerned, if we take the Steps, but He doesn't give baths.

Heard – “(1) I can't help myself. (2) How could I possibly help anyone else?”

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BB – (1) - *“We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.”* AA, pg. 84

(2) – *“We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others.”*
AA, pg. 132

Heard – *“This is a selfish program.”*

BB – *“Selfishness – self centeredness! That we think is the root of our troubles.”*

AA, pg. 62

“Never was I to pray for myself, except as my requests bore on my usefulness to others. Then only might I receive. But that would be in great measure.” AA, pg.13

“While I lay in the hospital the thought came that there were thousands of hopeless alcoholics who might be glad to have what had so freely been given me. Perhaps, I could help some of them. They in turn might work with others.” AA, pg. 14

“It is important for him to realize that your attempt to pass this on to him plays a vital part in your own recovery. Actually, he may be helping you more than you are helping him.” AA, pg. 94

(Note: A paradox of Alcoholics Anonymous. We come to Alcoholics Anonymous to save our lives and learn we must pass our message of hope on to others if we are to live. So, the Program of Alcoholics Anonymous is both selfish and it is selfless.)

Heard – *“We learn to live life on life’s terms.”*

BB – *“Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us.”* AA, pg. 77

It would appear from this that we are to learn to live our life on God’s terms.

Heard – *“I haven’t had a drink today so I am a complete success.”*

BB – *“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.”* AA, pg. 19

Heard – *“It really doesn’t make any difference what your problem is. AA has the best program.”*

BB – *“The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.”* AA, pg. 564

What part of “only stop drinking” do so many people not understand?

“Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” AA, pg. 564

An AA group is for alcoholics only (Tradition Five). We all have problems other than our drinking but alcoholism is our only common problem. And the Founders of over 200 Twelve Step Programs that have nothing to do with drinking would disagree with what is “Heard.”

Heard – *“Don’t make any major decisions for the first year.”*

BB – *“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.*

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(b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.

(c) That God could and would if He were sought.

Being convinced, we were at Step Three, which is that we decided to turn our will and life over to God as we understood Him. AA, pg. 60

Heard - "I'm feeling pretty crappy. I need a meeting."

BB - *"I was not too well at the time, and was plagued with waves of self-pity and resentment. This sometimes nearly drove me back to drink, but I soon found that when all other measures failed, working with another alcoholic would save the day. Many times I have gone to my old hospital in despair. On talking to a man there, I would be amazingly lifted up and set on my feet. It is a design for living that works in rough going."* AA, pg.15

Heard - "You ought to go to 90 meetings in 90 days."

BB - *"We (chronic alcoholics) 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."* AA, pg. 24

Why would a right thinking member of Alcoholics Anonymous direct a newcomer to sit in meetings with untreated alcoholics to listen to them "discuss" the "issues", problems, ideas and opinions of untreated alcoholics for 90 meetings in as many days? That has proved to be a death sentence for many alcoholics.

Heard - "You are feeling emotionally disturbed? You ought to get some professional help."

BB - *"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."* AA, pg. 58

(Note: One of the largest fellowships today is "Emotions Anonymous." They have found a Solution for many who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders through their adaptation of our Twelve Step program.)

Heard - "Don't be so hard on yourself."

BB - *"The rule is we must be hard on ourselves, but always considerate of others."* AA, pg. 74

Heard - "Alcoholism is a problem of denial."

(Note: Denial - "Refusal to admit the truth. - Webster's Collegiate Dictionary - circa 1936.) Sure sounds like lying, doesn't it? Alcoholics are real good at that.

BB - *"Whatever the definition of the word may be, we call it plain insanity."* AA, pg. 37

"However intelligent we may have been in other respects, where alcohol has been involved, we have been strangely insane." AA, pg. 38

"Again it was the old, insidious insanity--that first drink." AA, pg. 154

And what is the hope of Step Two? That we can find a Power greater than ourselves that could restore us to sanity.

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Heard - "It is my opinion that" or

"I don't know anything about the Big Book but here is the way I do it."

BB - *"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."*

AA, pg 19

(Note: The Big Book is based solely on the experience and knowledge of the first one hundred recovered alcoholics. The Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous has been unable to find any way to improve on its effectiveness since it was first published. It contains no opinions because one thing the early members learned was that opinions have the power to kill alcoholics.)

Heard - "My sponsor told me that, if in making an amend I would be harmed, I could consider myself as one of the 'others' in Step Nine."

BB - *"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 might be."* AA, pg. 79

Heard - "Be good to yourself."

BB - *"The rule is we must be hard on ourself, but always considerate of others."*

AA, pg. 74

Heard - "Never pray for patience. You'll regret it if you do."

BB - *"So clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness and love."* AA, pg. 83

Heard - "Alcoholics Anonymous is a self-help program."

BB - *"We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves."* AA, pg. 84

It would appear from this that it is a God-help program.

Heard - "We don't work the steps, we just take them."

BB - *"Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. But they will always materialize if we work for them."* AA, pg. 84

"If he did not work, he would surely drink again." AA, pg. 15

"On each of these occasions we worked with him, reviewing carefully what had happened." AA, pg.35

"Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well." AA, pg. 63

"It works, if we have the proper attitude and work at it." AA, pg. 86

"Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity form drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail." AA, pg. 89

"Now we try to put spiritual principles to work in every department of our lives."

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AA, pg. 116

And there are more for serious students to find.

Heard – “Oh, just turn it over.”

BB – “*Simple, but not easy; a price had to be paid.*” AA, pg. 14

Heard – “Your Higher Power can be whatever you want It to be; a door knob, a Dr. Pepper can, a light bulb, just any old thing.

BB – “*Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*”

AA, pg. 59 (A door knob?)

“*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.*” AA, pg. 45 (A Dr. Pepper can?)

“*The great fact is 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 God’s universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way that is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us that we could never do by ourselves.*” AA, pg. 25 (A light bulb?)

Heard – “This is a ‘suggested’ program. You can work it any way you want to. Just take what you like and leave the rest.”

BB – “*To show others precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book.*” (*The Big Book, that is.*) AA, pg. xiii

(Note – Dr. Bob is quoted as saying, “There is no such thing as individual interpretation of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.”)

Heard – “Your problem is you just don’t have enough faith.”

BB – “*He may be an example of the truth that faith alone is insufficient. To be vital, faith must be accompanied by self sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action.*”

AA, pg. 93

Heard – “Making meetings is a means of spiritual growth.”

BB – “*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. If he didn’t work, he would surely drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die.*”

AA, pgs.14-15

Heard – “There are no ‘musts’ in Alcoholics Anonymous”

BB – “*As a part of his rehabilitation he commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing upon them that they must do likewise with still others.*”

AA, pg. xiii

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“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.” AA, pg. 14

“Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must or it kills us.” AA, pg. 62

“Every day is a day when we must carry a vision of God’s will into all of our activities. ‘How can I best serve Thee—Thy will (not mine) be done.’ These are thoughts which must go with us constantly.” AA, pg. 85

(Note: According to one authority, the word “must” appears no less than 67 times in the Basic Text. Get out your Big Book and count them and see if they are right.

If, to those,

you add “had to” and “have to”, it gets to be a bunch. While you are at it, look for the results or the “Promises.”

Heard – “Steps Ten, Eleven & Twelve are maintenance Steps.”

BB – “*We have entered the world of the Spirit. Our next function is to ‘grow’ in understanding and effectiveness.*” AA, pg. 84

“It is easy to let up on our 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.” AA, pg. 85

So it would appear that Steps Ten, Eleven & Twelve are both “growth” Steps and “maintenance” Steps. Through working them moment by moment, day by day, we “grow” spiritually and thereby “maintain” our physical sobriety.

And what about the “understanding and effectiveness”?

BB – “*Well, that is exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself that will solve your problem.*” AA, pg. 45

We grow spiritually and come to understand that we do, in fact, have a Power greater than ourselves that will solve our problems and effectiveness in learning how to apply these Steps to what we consider to be a problem.

Heard – “There are no instructions for ‘sponsorship’ in the Big Book.”

What is “sponsorship?” Isn’t it working with others? What is the title of the Chapter following, “INTO ACTION?”

BB – “Chapter 7”

“WORKING WITH OTHERS”

“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.” AA, pg. 60

“PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics.” AA, pg. 89

Chapter 7 gives clear-cut directions on how to successfully “sponsor” alcoholics who are willing to go to any length for victory over alcohol.

Heard – “This is a journey without a destination.”

BB – “*We have entered the world of the Spirit.*” AA, pg. 84

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The chronic alcoholic had better enter the world of the Spirit or they will return to the world of "spirits."

(Note – SPIRITS – "Alcohol." Webster's Collegiate Dictionary – circa 1936.)

Heard – "Wait until they are ready. They'll show up."

BB – *"Search out another alcoholic and try again."* AA, pg. 96

"Your job now is to be at a place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful." AA, pg. 102

"In the chapter 'Working With Others' you gathered an idea of how we approach and aid others to health." AA, pg. 153

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we try to carry this message to alcoholics....." AA, pg. 60

How can we carry something if we are sitting on our butts?

Heard – "You work your program and I'll work my program."

BB – *"We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join brotherly and harmonious action. That is the great news this book carries to those who suffer from alcoholism."* AA, pg. 17

Heard – "I am powerless over people, places and things."

It would appear that these folks are candidates for PPTA. AA is for those who declare:

BB – *"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol."* AA, pg. 59

Heard – "I do Step Ten at night." Or "I do Step Ten when I'm wrong and need to apologize to someone."

BB – *"Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear (Step Four). When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them (Steps Six & Seven). Discuss them with someone immediately (Step Five) and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help (Step Twelve)."* AA, pg. 84

Heard – "Fake it until you make it."

BB – *"Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon. Here are the steps we took which are suggested as a program of recovery."* AA, pg. 59

Heard - "I don't know how it works."

There is a chapter titled "HOW IT WORKS" and it begins with a statement as to how it works:

BB – *"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path."* AA, pg. 58

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Discussion meetings are a lot of talk.

But

Recovery is a very short walk.

(The life giving Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, that is.)

If confession (Step Ten) and prayer and meditation (Step Eleven) were sufficient, we wouldn't have so many priests in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Be a fisher of men. You catch them. He'll clean them!