



SPIN-WHEEL TOPICS

OUR MOSTLY
AGNOSTIC
GROUP OF DRUNKS

As
one of my early A.A.
sponsors used to say, I didn't
hang out with lower companions—I
had become one.

The specifics are pretty much the same as for most alcoholics. I went places I used to swear I would never go. I did things I could not imagine myself doing. I hung out with people that at one time I would cross the street to avoid. There came a time when, looking into the mirror, I honestly did not know just who was looking back at me. To say that I had arrived at a "jumping-off point" is an understatement. Life just could not go on like this much longer."

**In Step
Two we decided to describe
God as a "Power greater than
ourselves." In Steps Three and Eleven we
inserted the words "God as we understood Him."
From Step Seven we deleted the expression "on our
knees." And, as a lead-in sentence to all the steps we wrote
these words: "Here are the steps we took which are suggested as
a**

**Program of Recovery." AA's Twelve Steps were to be suggestions only.
Such were the final concessions to those of little or no faith; this was the
great contribution of our atheists and agnostics. They had widened our
gateway so that all who suffer may pass through, regardless of their belief
or lack of belief."**

Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, Page 167, 1957

**In AA's first years I all but ruined the whole undertaking... God as I
understood Him had to be for everybody. Sometimes my aggression was
subtle and sometimes it was crude. But either way it was damaging –
perhaps fatally so – to numbers of non-believers.**

*Bill Wilson, Grapevine Article, "The Dilemma of No Faith",
1961*

O u r
membership ought to include
all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence
we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor
ought AA membership ever depend on money or
conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together
for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as
a group, they have no other affiliation.

Third Tradition, Long Form, 1946

So long as there is the slightest interest in sobriety, the most unmoral, the
most anti-social, the most critical alcoholic may gather about him a few
kindred spirits and announce to us that a new Alcoholics Anonymous Group
has been formed. Anti-God, anti-medicine, anti-our Recovery Program, even
anti-each other — these rampant individuals are still an AA Group if they think
so!

Bill Wilson, Grapevine Article, "Anarchy Melts", 1946

Do you think we should tell those people: 'You can't belong to Alcoholics
Anonymous unless you print those Twelve Steps the way we have
them?' No.... We even have a Tradition that guarantees the right of
any group to vary all of them, if they want to. Let's remember, we
are talking about *suggested* steps and traditions.

Bill Wilson, General Service Conference, 1953

F o r
the next four
years, I didn't do much
but go to meetings and do a
bit of service. In those four
years I just got sicker, until one
day I had a choice to make: kill
myself or get a sponsor and work
the Steps.

p-86, The "God" Word, page 12

As an atheist, I have found over 15 years of rewarding growth in A.A., but the absence of agreement on religious issues has been a challenge. Once I started to take A.A.'s suggestions, confusion gave way to clarity, and A.A.'s gifts of happiness, serenity and gratitude slowly made their way into my life.

But there was a difficulty for me in those early days. At meeting after meeting, I heard that if I expected lasting sobriety I'd have to somehow "come to believe" that a mystical force was in charge of my life, that I'd have to "turn my will" over to this supernatural force, and even seek to discover "his will for me." I was horrified to think that such would be the price of sobriety for me — I would have to renounce my rational convictions. I was in despair. Then I found a sponsor who showed me the ropes. He guided me through my First Step and taught me that sobriety was possible for an alcoholic who was unable to pretend that reality was something it wasn't. In fact, he told me, honesty required **not pretending** about anything; and honesty, he told me, was a non-negotiable requirement for sobriety.

But, in order to be honest, I would have to examine myself carefully; I would have to embrace a power that would let me see myself for what I was. I would have to turn my life over to the power of reason if I were to be "restored to sanity." After all, the essence of my alcoholic insanity was a cognitive break with reality. When I "turned my life over" to the higher power of reason, the insanity began to dissolve away.

I discovered that life can be driven by the principles of the Steps rather than by my impulses and urges. As I "turned my life over" to the principles of the Steps, my former alcoholic behaviors began to take a back seat.

My character defects and shortcomings were all tied up with the urges and impulses of my former alcoholic life. The more I aligned my life with the *principles* of the Steps, the more clearly I was able to see the world, and the less frequently I found myself at the mercy of urges and impulses, anger and resentments; of guilt from harm done to others; or of just plain fears. I was being set free!

It could never have happened drunk; it could never have happened without discovering the principles of the Steps. It happened when the principles of the Steps were put into practice by a mind set free by the higher power of reason. It is a "blessing" for which I shall be forever grateful.

If I come into A.A., won't I miss a lot of friends and a lot of fun?

The best answer to this is the experience of the hundreds of thousands of men and women who have already come into A.A. In general, their attitude is that they did not enjoy real friendships or real fun until they joined A.A. Their point of view on both has changed.

Many alcoholics discover that their best friends are delighted to see them face up to the fact that they cannot handle alcohol. No one wants to see a friend continue to hurt.

Naturally, it is important to distinguish between friendships and casual barroom *acquaintanceships*. The alcoholic is likely to have many acquaintances whose conviviality may be missed for a while. But their place will be taken by the hundreds of A.A.s the newcomer will meet — men and women who offer understanding acceptance, and help in sustaining sobriety at all times.

Few members of A.A. would trade the fun that comes with sobriety for what *seemed* to be fun while they were drinking.

Frequently Asked Questions about A.A.

page 26

Is A.A. a religious society?

A.A. is not a religious society, since it requires no definite religious belief as a condition of membership. Although it has been endorsed and approved by many religious leaders, it is not allied with any organization or sect. Included in its membership are Catholics, Protestants, Jews, members of other major religious bodies, agnostics, and atheists.

The A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism is undeniably based on acceptance of certain spiritual values. The individual member is free to interpret those values as he or she thinks best, or not to think about them at all.

Most members, before turning to A.A., had already admitted that they could not control their drinking. Alcohol had become a power greater than themselves, and it had been accepted on those terms. A.A. suggests that to achieve and maintain sobriety, alcoholics need to accept and depend upon another power recognized as greater than themselves. Some alcoholics choose to consider the A.A. group itself as the power greater than themselves; for many others, this power is God — *as they, individually, understand Him*; still others rely upon *entirely different concepts* of a higher power.

**p-2, Frequently Asked Questions About
A.A. page 19**

**Remember that
alcoholism is a
progressive disease. Take
it seriously, even if you feel
you are only in the early
stages of the illness.
Alcoholism kills people. If you
are an alcoholic, and if you
continue to drink, in time
you will get worse.**

p24: A Newcomer Asks, p. 3

How
can this help me
with my drinking problem?

We in A.A. know what it is like to be addicted to alcohol, and to be unable to keep promises made to others and ourselves that we will stop drinking. We are not professional therapists. Our only qualification for helping others to recover from alcoholism is that we have stopped drinking ourselves; and problem drinkers coming to us know that recovery is possible because they see people who have done it.

p24: A Newcomer Asks, p. 67

SPONSORSHIP

In A.A., sponsor and sponsored meet as equals, just as Bill and Dr. Bob did. Essentially, the process of sponsorship is this: An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another alcoholic who is attempting to attain or maintain sobriety through A.A.

Questions & Answers on Sponsorship, p.7

And
we have ceased
fighting anything or anyone -
even alcohol. For by this time sanity
will have returned. We 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. We 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.

**PRACTICING
THESE PRINCIPLES IN ALL
OUR AFFAIRS MEANS AT
WORK TOO.**

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 man'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.

Alcoholics Anonymous p. 67

**RESENTMENT IS
THE "NUMBER ONE"
OFFENDER. IT DESTROYS
MORE ALCOHOLICS
THAN ANYTHING
ELSE.**

Life

will take on new meaning. 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.

We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives.



**Service
Work &
Helping
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.**

“Now and then all of us fall under heavy criticism. When we are angered and hurt, it’s difficult not to retaliate in kind. Yet we can restrain ourselves and then probe ourselves, asking whether our critics were really right. If so, we can admit our defects to them. This usually clears the air for mutual understanding.”

Excerpt From: “As Bill Sees It.” - 184

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 *God 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.

* Some choose to replace "God" with "A.A." or "the
program."

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 men. 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 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.

O u r
behavior is as absurd
and incomprehensible with
respect to the first drink as that of an
individual with a passion, say, for jay-walking.

He gets a thrill out of hanging out at bars. He enjoys himself for a few years in spite of friendly warnings. Up to this point you would label him as a foolish chap having queer ideas of fun. Luck then deserts him and he goes out on sprees several times in succession. Presently he gets drunk again and this time he ends up in the hospital. Within a week after leaving the hospital he's back drinking. He tells you he has decided to stop drinking for good, but in a few weeks he is back drinking. On through the years this conduct continues, accompanied by his continual promises to be careful or to keep away from the bars altogether. Finally, he can no longer work, his wife gets a divorce and he is held up to ridicule. He tries every known means to get the drinking idea out of his head. He shuts himself up in an asylum, hoping to mend his ways. But the day he comes out he races back to the bar, which sets off another spree. Such a man would be crazy, wouldn't he? 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.

I can
do the same thing
with an A.A. meeting. The
more I focus my mind on its
defects — late start, long drunkalogs,
cigarette smoke — the worse the meeting
becomes. But when I try to see what I can
add to the meeting, rather than what I can get
out of it, and when I focus my mind on what's
good about it, rather than what's wrong with it,
the meeting keeps getting better and better.
When I focus on what's good today, I have a
good day, and when I focus on what's bad, I
have a bad day. If I focus on a problem, the
problem increases; if I focus on the
answer, the answer increases.

**What do I
do if I'm going
to an event
where alcohol
will be
served?**

**A.A.'s
co-founder Bill W.
wrote in 1965:**

We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of nearly every race, culture and religion.

In A.A. we are supposed to be bound together in the kinship of a common suffering. Consequently, the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for us all. Let us not, therefore, pressure anyone with our individual or even our collective views. Let us instead accord each other the respect and love that is due to every human being as he tries to make his way toward the light. Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive; let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of A.A., so long as he or she declares.

Whatever you do, please don't let someone else's religious beliefs prevent you from finding the solution that is available to you through Alcoholics Anonymous.

p86, The "God" Word, page 5-6

“After that I sat for a week, a body in a chair, a mind off in space. I thought the two would never get together. I knew that alcohol and I had to part. I couldn’t live with it anymore. And yet, how was I going to live without it? I didn’t know. I was bitter, living in hate.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 298

How I ran my home, I don't know. I went on, realizing what I was becoming, hating myself for it, bitter, blaming life, blaming everything but the fact that I should turn about and do something about my drinking.

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 297

“Above all, we reject fantasizing and accept reality. The more I drank, the more I fantasized everything. I imagined getting even for hurts and rejections. In my mind’s eye I played and replayed scenes in which I was plucked magically from the bar where I stood nursing a drink and was instantly exalted to some position of power and prestige. I lived in a dream world.

A.A. led me gently from this fantasizing to embrace reality with open arms. And I found it beautiful! For, at last, I was at peace with myself. And with others.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 559

**I came to A.A.
in order to stop
drinking; what I
received in return
was my life.**

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 327

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. We are people who normally would not mix. But 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."

— Alcoholics Anonymous, page 17

As the treatment progressed, I began to get a picture of myself, of the temperament that had caused me so much trouble. I had been hypersensitive, shy, idealistic. My inability to accept the harsh realities of life had resulted in a disillusioned cynic, clothed in a protective armor against the world's misunderstanding. That armor had turned into prison walls, locking me in loneliness—and fear. All I had left was an iron determination to live my own life in spite of the alien world—and here I was, an inwardly frightened, outwardly defiant woman, who desperately needed a prop to keep going.

— Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Edition

**I just have to ask
whether acceptance
— or change — is
required.**

DAILY REFLECTIONS, March 22nd

Good judgment, a careful sense of timing, courage and prudence — these are the qualities we shall need when we take Step Nine.

TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS, p. 83

To make amends can be viewed two ways: first, that of repairing damage, for if I have damaged my neighbor's fence, I "make a mend," and that is a direct amend; the second way is by modifying my behavior, for if my actions have harmed someone, I make a daily effort to cause no further harm. I "mend my ways," and that is an indirect amend. Which is the best approach? The only right approach, provided that I am causing no further harm in so doing, is to do both. If harm is done, then I simply "mend my ways." To take action in this manner assures me of making honest amends.

DAILY REFLECTIONS, SEPTEMBER 13

When new members come into my A.A. group, do I make a special effort to make them feel at home? Do I put myself out to listen to them, even if their ideas of A.A. are vague? Do I make it a habit to talk to all new members myself, or do I often leave that to someone else? I may not be able to help them, but, then, again it may be something that I might say that would put them on the right track. When I see any members sitting alone, do I put myself out to be nice to them, or do I stay among my own special group of friends and leave them out in the cold? Are all new A.A.s my responsibility?

**“If
somebody hurts us
and we are sore, we are in
the wrong also.”**

-TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS, p. 90

What a freedom I felt when this passage was pointed out to me! Suddenly I saw that I could do something about my anger, I could fix me, instead of trying to fix them. I believe that there are no exceptions to the axiom. When I am angry, my anger is always self-centered. I must keep reminding myself that I am human, that I am doing the best I can, even when that best is sometimes poor.

- DAILY REFLECTIONS, October 10th

**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 business.**

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 143

O u r

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 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.

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 84

Identifying, they said, was trying to see how I was like the people I was with. Comparing, they told me, was looking for differences, usually seeing how I was better than others.

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 405

M e n
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.

Alcoholics Anonymous, page xxviii
“The Doctor’s Opinion”

Half
measures availed us
nothing. We stood at the
turning point.

Alcoholics Anonymous page 59

Every day I stand at turning points. My thoughts and actions can propel me toward growth or turn me down the road to old habits and to booze. Sometimes turning points are beginnings, as when I decide to start praising, instead of condemning someone. Or when I begin to ask for help instead of going it alone. At other times turning points are endings, such as when I see clearly the need to stop festering resentments or crippling self-seeking.

Daily Reflections, January 7th

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.

S e l f i s h n e s s ,
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
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!

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 62

**One
of the primary
differences between
alcoholics and
non-alcoholics is that
non-alcoholics change their
behavior to meet their goals
and alcoholics change their
goals to meet their
behaviors.**

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 423

And
acceptance is the
answer to all my
problems today. When I am
disturbed, it is because I find
some person, place, thing, or
situation "some fact of my life"
unacceptable to me, and I can find no
serenity until I accept that person,
place, thing, or situation as being
exactly the way it is supposed to be
at this moment.

Alcoholics Anonymous page 417

We sometimes hurt those we love because they need to be “taught a lesson,” when we really want to punish. We were depressed and complained we felt bad, when in fact we were mainly asking for sympathy and attention. This odd trait of mind and emotion, this perverse wish to hide a bad motive underneath a good one, permeates human affairs from top to bottom. This subtle and elusive kind of self-righteousness can underlie the smallest act or thought. Learning daily to spot, admit, and correct these flaws is the essence of character-building and good living. An honest regret for harms done, a genuine gratitude for blessings received, and a willingness to try for better things tomorrow will be the permanent assets we shall seek.

12 Steps & 12 Traditions

“When I focus on what’s good today, I have a good day, and when I focus on what’s bad, I have a bad day. If I focus on a problem, the problem increases; if I focus on the answer, the answer increases.”

Alcoholics Anonymous, page 419



**Sometimes,
getting better
means feeling
worse.**

**“Where
humility had
formerly stood for a
forced feeding on humble
pie, it now begins to mean
the nourishing ingredient
which can give us serenity.”**

Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions p. 74

H.A.L.T.

Don't let yourself get too...

Hungry (or **Horny**), **Angry**, **Lonely**
or **Tired**.

I
picked up a half gallon
of whiskey one day after work
and drank over one-third of it in less
than four hours that same night. I was so
sick the next day, but I made it to work. When
I got home from work, I sat on my parents' sofa
and knew, I knew, I would start working on the half
gallon again, despite the fact that I was still very ill
from the night before. I also knew that I did not want to
drink. Sitting on that sofa, I realized that the old "I could
stop if I wanted to, I just don't want to" didn't apply here,
because I did not want to drink. I watched myself get up
off the sofa and pour myself a drink. When I sat back down
on the sofa, I started to cry. My denial had cracked; I
believe I hit bottom that night, but I didn't know it then;
I just thought I was insane. I proceeded to finish the
half gallon.

Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 324

Check Yourself

Sometimes *you* are the toxic person. Sometimes *you* are the mean, negative person. Sometimes the problem is *you*. And that doesn't make you less worthy. Keep on growing. Keep on checking yourself. Keep on motivating yourself. Mistakes are opportunities. Look at them, own them, grow from them and move on.

There is no
angry way to
say

“bubbles”

- some guy

W h e n
we first heard the word "alcoholic,"
most of us associated it exclusively with older,
unkempt, shaky, or unpleasant men we saw pan- handling
or passed out on skid rows. Well-informed people are now aware
that such an idea is rubbish. Nevertheless, a residue of our ancient,
muddy notions clung to many of us during our first attempts at sobriety. They
blurred our vision and made it difficult to see the truth. But we finally became
willing to entertain the thought that—just possibly—some of those ideas could be a bit
erroneous, or at least no longer reflected accurately our own personal experience.

When we could persuade ourselves to look at that experience honestly and to listen to ideas other
than our own, we became open to a big array of information we had not examined carefully before.
For instance, we could look at the scientific description: Alcohol is a drug that alters consciousness, not
just a tasty thirst-quencher. The drug is found, we learned, not only in beverages, but also in some foods
and medicines. And now, almost every day, we read or hear of a discovery that this particular drug does
one more kind of physical damage (to the heart, the blood, the stomach, the liver, the mouth, the brain, etc.)
not suspected before.

Pharmacologists and other addictions experts now say that alcohol is not to be considered totally safe and
harmless, whether used as beverage, stimulant, sedative, tonic, or tranquilizer. But it does not, of itself,
necessarily lead straight to physical harm or mental degradation in every single case. Apparently, most people
who use it can do so gracefully, without injury to themselves or others.

Drinking, we found, can be viewed medically as ingestion of a drug; drunkenness, as overdosing. The
misuse of this drug can, directly and indirectly, lead to problems of all sorts—physical, psychological,
domestic, social, financial, vocational. Instead of thinking mostly about what drinking did *for us*, we
began to see what it does *to us*.

We have found out that *anybody* who has trouble of any sort related to drinking may have the
condition called "alcoholism." This illness strikes without regard for age, creed, sex,
intelligence, ethnic background, emotional health, occupation, family situation, strong
constitution, eating habits, social or economic status, or general character. It is not a
question of how much or how you drink, or when, or why, but of how your
drinking affects your life—what *happens* when you drink.

First Things First

Here's an old saying that has special, strong meaning for us. Simply stated, it is this: Above all other concerns, we must remember that we cannot drink. Not drinking is the first order of business for us, anywhere, any time, under any circumstances. This is strictly a matter of survival for us. We have learned that alcoholism is a killer disease, leading to death in a large number of ways.

We prefer not to activate that disease by risking a drink.

Treatment of our condition, as the American Medical Association has noted, "primarily involves not taking a drink." Our experience reinforces that prescription for therapy. In practical, day-by-day matters, this means we must take whatever steps are necessary, at whatever inconvenience, not to drink.

Thousands of us seem to enjoy meetings more and more as the sober years go by. So it is a pleasure, not a duty.

We all have to keep on eating, bathing, breathing, brushing our teeth, and the like. And millions of people continue year after year working, reading, going in for sports and other recreation, frequenting social clubs, and performing religious worship. So our continued attendance at AA meetings is hardly peculiar, as long as we enjoy them, profit from them, and keep the rest of our lives in balance.

But most of us go to meetings more frequently in the first years of our recovery than we do later. It helps set a solid foundation for a long-term recovery.

Most AA groups hold one or two meetings a week (lasting about an hour or an hour and a half). And it is widely believed in AA that a new AA member fares best by getting into the habit of regularly attending the meetings of at least one group, as well as visiting other groups from time to time. This not only provides a big choice of differing AA ideas; it also helps bring into the problem drinker's life a measure of orderliness, which helps combat alcoholism.

We have found it quite important, especially in the beginning, to attend meetings faithfully, no matter what excuses present themselves for staying away.

We need to be as diligent in attending AA meetings as we were in drinking. What serious drinker ever let distance, or weather, or illness, or business, or guests, or being broke, or the hour, or anything else keep him or her from that really wanted drink? We cannot let anything keep us from AA meetings, either, if we really want to recover.

We have also found that going to meetings is not something to be done only when we feel the temptation to drink. We often get more good from the meetings by attending them when we feel fine and haven't so much as thought of drinking. And even a meeting which is not totally, instantly satisfying is better than no meeting at all.

Alcoholism is expensive.

Although AA itself charges no dues or fees whatsoever, we have already paid pretty heavy "dues" to liquor stores and bartenders before we get here. Therefore, many of us arrive at AA. nearly broke, if not heavily in debt. The sooner we can become self-supporting, the better, we have found. Creditors are almost always happy to go along with us as long as they see we are really making an honest, regular effort to climb out of the hole, even in tiny installments. A particular kind of expenditure, however—in addition to food, clothing, and shelter, naturally—has been found extremely valuable in our first sober days. One of us has given his permission to print here his "Investment Counsel"

**In the first few weeks without a drink, When the wolf is at the door,
And the sheriffs at the window, And you're sleeping on the floor,
And life looks bleak and hopeless, From a monetary angle,
It's time to spend, in certain ways, To solve the awful tangle:
That token or that bus fare, To get you to a meeting,
That dime to use the telephone, for that necessary greeting,
That nickel for "expenses", That makes you feel you matter,
That dollar for the coffee shop, For after-meeting chatter.
All these are wise investments for the neophyte to make.
This "bread," when cast upon the waters,
Always comes back cake.**

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O u r
experience clearly proves
that any drinking at all leads to
serious trouble for the alcoholic, or
problem drinker. In the words of the American
Medical Association:

Alcohol, aside from its addictive qualities, also has a psychological effect that modifies thinking and reasoning. One drink can change the thinking of an alcoholic so that he feels he can tolerate another, and then another, and another... The alcoholic can learn to completely control his disease, but the affliction cannot be cured so that he can return to alcohol without adverse consequences.

And we repeat: Somewhat to our surprise, staying sober turns out not to be the grim, wet-blanket experience we had expected! While we were drinking, a life without alcohol seemed like no life at all. But for most members of AA, living sober is really living—a joyous experience. We much prefer it to the troubles we had with drinking. One more note: anyone can get sober. We have all done it lots of times. The trick is to stay and to live sober.

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UNITY

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