

HOW

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A Clean Sweep

For a time in AA, about the only thing that I noticed about Step Ten was the "when we were wrong" part, which, of course, seldom if ever applied to me. That blissful state of ignorance and denial came to a crashing halt at the beginning of my second year of sobriety, when a rather annoying old-timer continually brought to my attention the spiritual axiom, "Every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us."

Then as my third year dawned, I was introduced to a seldom mentioned Tenth Step exercise. An old-timer (of course) rather strongly suggested that I set aside time at the beginning of each year to do an "annual Tenth Step housecleaning." Driven by "Just-where-does-it-say-that?" and convinced that she was just a tad out of focus and creating "her" version of Step Ten, I flipped open my "Twelve and Twelve." Golly, gosh, gee. There it was, in black and white on page 89: "Many AAs go in for annual or semiannual housecleanings." Mustering up as much grim resignation as possible, I scuffed my way back to the table, plopped into a chair, and slouched down with all the petulance of a three-year-old (which must have looked pretty silly, since I was in my late thirties).

"And the point of this exercise?" I whined.

"So that, God willing, my dear, you cannot only pass the 'acid test,' but also experience fully the Realm of the Spirit," was her response.

The acid test?

1. stay sober;
2. keep in emotional balance;
3. live to good purpose under all conditions.

I had no comeback, so I followed her directions and have done so every year since.

The premise was simple: Make a list of the significant people, places, and things in my life today. She defined "today" as the past year, clarifying that this was not another Fourth Step inventory. I was to write a brief narrative that accurately described my relationship (or lack of one) with each of them. Then, I was to sit quietly and reflect on each name and what I'd written. It was a powerful learning experience.

Now when I clean house, there are names that have been on the list every year, and every year there are new names to add. Using the incredible tapestry of AA's Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts as my guide, I'm able to see how well I do, or in some cases, do not interact with God's other children. It is a constant spiritual challenge that does not necessarily get easier just because so many years have passed.

So, who's on the list? My father, for example. Although my dad's been dead for thirty-three years, he continues to influence my life. With each year, my perspective on our relationship gets healthier. Somewhere around the seven year mark, God opened my heart. I know now that my dad loved me very much. Today I am free from the bondage of overcompensating and over-achieving to win approval or love. This dangerous pattern followed me into my first few years of sobriety.

Among the others on this year's list are my mother, now in her mid-eighties; my two children, ages twenty-seven and thirty-four, from whom I've been estranged for eighteen years (a very long story); other family members; my sponsor; sponsees; members of my home group and Twelfth Step group; friends, both AA and non-AA (what a gift!); school acquaintances; a new boss; my old boss; a wonderful crew of former co-workers (we all became "dislocated" when the company closed). Oh, did I mention God? No relationship has changed more

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10 Ten X

STEP

“Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.”

A continuous look at our assets and liabilities, and a real desire to learn and grow by this means, are necessities for us. We alcoholics have learned this the hard way. More experienced people, of course, in all times and places have practiced unsparing self-survey and criticism.

For the wise have always known that no one can make much of his life until self-searching becomes a regular habit, until he is able to admit and accept what he finds, and until he patiently and persistently tries to correct what is wrong.

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TRADITION

“Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”

1. Do I ever give the impression that there really *is* an “AA opinion” on Antabuse? Tranquilizers? Doctors? Psychiatrists? Churches? Hospitals? Jails? Alcohol? The federal or state government? Legalizing marijuana? Vitamins? AI-Anon? Alateen?
2. Can I honestly share my own personal experience concerning any of those without giving the impression I am stating the “AA opinion”?
3. What in AA history gave rise to our Tenth Tradition?
4. Have I had a similar experience in my own AA life?
5. What would AA be without this Tradition? Where would I be?
6. Do I breach this or any of its supporting Traditions in subtle, perhaps unconscious, ways?
7. How can I manifest the spirit of this Tradition in my personal life outside AA? Inside AA?

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CONCEPT

Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined whether by tradition, by resolution, by specific Job description or by appropriate charters and bylaws.

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TREATMENT: GROUP COMMITMENTS

ALCOHOPE

Meeting Open to AA Community
5925 37th St, Vero Beach, FL 32966
778-7215

CENTER FOR EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

CEBH - Meeting Closed to Public
1190 37th St, Vero Beach, FL 32960
563-4666

TUESDAYS

SATURDAYS

Easy Does It	Oct 12	ODAAT	Oct 16
Free & Easy	Oct 19	Sebastian Freedom	Oct 23
Friday Young People	Oct 26	South Vero	Oct 30
Indian River Men's	Nov 2	Vero Beach 12&12	Nov 6
Midnight Oil	Nov 9	Barefoot Bay	Nov 13
New Awakening	Nov 16	Candlelight	Nov 20

MONDAYS

Noontime Recovery	Oct 11	Indian River Women's	Nov 15
Safe Harbor	Oct 18	Noontime Recovery	Nov 22
South Vero	Oct 25	Safe Harbor	Nov 29
Friday Young People	Nov 1	South Vero	Dec 6
Indian River Thursday	Nov 8	Friday Young People	Dec 13

Alchohope and CEBH meetings are sponsored by the Treatment Committee of the Indian River Central Office of Alcoholics Anonymous and should be conducted in keeping with AA guidelines.

If your group would like to participate in the rotating commitment for carrying the AA message into these facilities, please contact the Treatment Committee Chair, Judy W. at 778-0444.

CEBH is a speaker/discussion meeting. Our format (as with Alchohope) is for two people to go to the facility, a meeting leader and a speaker. Unlike Alchohope, however, this is NOT a public meeting. A copy of the AA *Preamble* and *How It Works* are at the front desk. Please return them after the meeting. Once the leader opens the meeting in the usual way, the speaker will share his/her experience, strength and hope as it pertains to alcoholism., making sure to leave adequate time for questions and answers. The meeting is closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Group commitments are currently needed for the CEBH meeting on Mondays at 7PM.

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than that one.

There are also "places," like home. (So, when will we finish painting?) "Things" can vary, but include pursuing a lifelong dream. I came to believe that with God, all things are possible and, if I'm sober, dreams can come true.

Inevitably, this annual housecleaning reveals change in at least some relationships--a drifting apart or, sadly, no contact at all. In these cases, my sponsor asks if there's something more I could or should do to reopen lines of communication. There are times when I have taken action. There are times when I have just let go.

Whatever I do (or don't do) can no longer be based on the old, destructive "scorecard." This can never be about someone else's actions. I must keep the focus on my behavior, my attitude. If I want peace on earth, or at least my little speck of it, I have to do my part. Did I keep in touch? Did I call or write? Did I reach out? Am I living these spiritual principles? There will always be room for improvement. I'm at the time in my life where there are fewer summers ahead of me than behind. They are too precious to waste on keeping score.

This Tenth Step exercise does not take much time. The list is composed with gratitude. Its length is humbling because all of these people, places, and things are in my life today solely by the grace of God, and because God's amazing grace guided me to Alcoholics Anonymous. A little housecleaning is the least I can do in return.



10th Step

OF ALL THE STEPS, Step Ten appears the least dramatic and offers to alcoholics the least stimulation to their characteristically romantic imaginations. Yet an AA member who thoroughly and constantly practices Step Ten could write a tremendously helpful and inspiring article on the AA way of life. It would illuminate the value of all the other Steps. On reading the last word, you would eagerly turn back to the first sentence, ready to apply to your own life its blueprint of how to practice with profit and happiness the AA principles in all your affairs.

This, needless to say, is not such an article.

In the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Bill W. reminds us of the observation that pain is "the touchstone of all spiritual progress." It is no coincidence that this statement occurs in the chapter on Step Ten. Step Ten is not necessarily the most painful one to work, but I find it agonizing to face the fact that, in my case, it is the most often neglected Step of the Twelve.

It would not be accurate to say that I *rarely* take personal inventory or that I *seldom* admit it when I am wrong. If I were indeed that lax and yet still sober after thirteen years, it would suggest that my sobriety was the result of sheer chance and that the AA program had little or no causal relationship to the overall improvement in my life. That, of course, would be a ridiculous conclusion. I do a lot of things that are right. So does any creature that remains alive.

Without the regular discipline of

Step Ten, however, I am on shaky ground. The right things I do may be the result of habit or inertia, or even of the absence of the opportunity to do something very wrong. For example, there is a Los Angeles city ordinance, on the books since around 1880 unless recently expunged, making it illegal to shoot jackrabbits from the open windows of a trolley car. Even during my most rambunctious drinking, I never once violated that ordinance! My virtue stemmed more from the absence of both jackrabbits and trolley cars than from the will to resist temptation.

In Chapter Six of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, we are reminded that the earlier Steps involve cleaning up the past, and that with Step Ten we have entered the world of the spirit. "It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels," the Big Book tells us. "We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities."

"Every day"?

That's what it says. And I certainly cannot claim that each day I carry the vision of God's will into each of my activities: my work life, my social life, my health life, or even my AA participation. True, I have remained sober. And despite various disappointments and frustrations and fears, I have not once had the urge to take a drink--not once in more than thirteen years. Isn't that proof I'm working the program?

Let's see. I mentioned "disappointments and frustrations and fears." Don't those very words indicate that *my will* is involved? Otherwise, why would I be disappointed or frustrated? And why "fears"? If I am truly and consistently turning my will and my life over to the care of God, as suggested in Step Three, why should I be afraid?

If I were diligent in applying Step Ten, then one would be mindful of this admonition in Chapter Six: "Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone."

Step Ten is the quality-control procedure of the Twelve Steps. It's the monitoring device. And alcoholics of my type are prone to overlook it, until things get painful.

Part of my work as a television writer involves the devising of incidents where human beings face a problem or a crisis. How they solve these problems, or are defeated by them, forms the very essence of drama, comedy, and tragedy. Every AA talk contains at least one such incident, relating to one or more of the Twelve Steps. Nearly every member has a dramatic incident illustrating Step One--how he came to admit his powerlessness over alcohol. Many can tell funny or tragic incidents illustrating Step Two--how they came to believe a Power greater than themselves could restore them to sanity. Our most moving and effective speakers enthrall local groups and convention audiences

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with examples of how, through Step Three, they learned to turn their wills and their lives over to the care of God as they understood Him. Some bring Step Eleven into meaningful reality by describing specific occasions when they learned the importance of improving their conscious contact with God, and learned how prayer brought power to sustain them through a great grief or hardship.

The Step Four inventory and the Step Five admission to God, oneself, and another human being, because they include transgressions while drinking, readily provide interesting material that we can all picture and respond to, because it involves action and emotional conflict.

The amends Steps, Eight and Nine, involve descriptions illustrating human folly, violence, greed, lust, and pathos. Even the apparently passive Steps, Six and Seven, can conjure up concrete examples of our readiness to have God remove character defects. Some years ago, my wounded pride and ego were compelling me into such constant absorption with myself that I was weakening my ability to function as a writer. Naturally, I did not see my difficulty as hurt pride; instead, I was "justifiably outraged" at what I regarded as unfair rating of my talent. While reviewing the Steps from memory in search of release from this psychic pain, I looked vainly for a prescription for an insulted TV writer.

Suddenly, I gained the insight that I was suffering from pride, and that pride is a defect of character. The Steps do contain

a prescription for such defects. Employing Steps Six and Seven, I asked God to remove my pride. But I realized that I was motivated chiefly by a desire to escape the pain, rather than a spiritual yearning for humility; so I added this thought: "God, if it is necessary for me to hurt in order for the defect to be removed, *then leave the pain* and take the defect."

Instantly, I experienced complete relief. The pain was gone. The hurt pride and ego, which had withstood logic, psychology, and even self-ridicule, vanished instantly when I sincerely worked Steps Six and Seven. I do not suggest that I am now completely free from all egotism, conceit, and supersensitivity. I am still vulnerable. But the discomfort of that particular instance was removed, and so far the returning attacks of pride are shorter-lived and less crippling.

On that occasion, because I worked Step Ten (continued to take inventory and admitted that I was wrong), I was guided to the proper Steps to apply to my problem--in this case. Six and Seven.

Because of my abiding defects, I do not continue to work Step Ten each day, but often wait till pain again forces me into action. Despite the ghastly examples around me, I risk the perils of sloth, indifference, and procrastination by letting days pass without an inventory. How fortunate I am that my AA contacts and commitments work to remind me, in spite of myself, that a Power is ready to help me, once I relinquish my self-will again, if only for an instant.

A couple of years ago, a brave

Englishman named Chichester sailed a small boat around the world, all alone. In one very profound sense, however, he was not alone. He brought along the accumulated experience of generations of sailors, dating back to the Phoenicians. Chichester weathered storms and darkness and fog, and found his way back safely to England, not through his own courage and skill alone, but with the hard-earned knowledge of ancient astronomers and navigators.

If we were to meet him, we would want to hear of his narrow escapes, of the dramatic incidents, of how he coped with obvious perils and dangers. Very likely, we would become bored or impatient if he were to tell us of his daily ritual of shooting the sun with the sextant, measuring the currents and wind direction and velocity, and taking a fix on the stars at night. Yet if it had not been for this daily inventory, the seaman's counterpart of Step Ten, Chichester could not have been sure where he was, where he was headed, or what possible emergencies might be expected.

Many alcoholics, after being subjected to a few AA meetings and exposed to the facts about the nature of their disease, frequently announce with confidence. "AA may be all right for you, but I'll do it by myself." Observation of such people often shows that they actually have no plan at all, and certainly no desire to stop drinking. For them, disregarding the accumulated experience of thousands of sober alcoholics is similar to attempting Chichester's lonely voyage first throwing overboard the

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compass, charts, stars, maps and all navigation instruments and mathematical tables. ("This junk may be okay for you, Chichester, but I'll do it by *myself!*")

If such an attitude, even in a physically strong and alert voyager, is shaky, rundown, and functioning badly in one or more areas of his life, as is the usual newcomer to AA, then "folly" is too mild a word.

In many respects, the Fellowship of AA is like a reasonably happy cruise ship or, in time of trouble, like a convoy. But in the long run, each of us has to chart his own course through his life.

When the seas are smooth, the sun is bright, and at night the stars are clear, we may become careless. We drift. And we neglect the daily inventory of Step Ten. True, we have not thrown the compass or the navigation book overboard, but we have gotten out of the habit of checking our position. Eventually, clouds conceal the stars; the seas get rough; our boat starts taking on water. Sometimes, we go into such a panic of bailing in order to keep afloat that we can't check our course, and disaster may lie dead ahead.

If we have been mindful of Step Ten with fair regularity, however, then we rarely go so far wrong that we can't make a few corrections and get back on course again.

In the years of my AA sobriety, I have had periods when I worked Step Ten with fair regularity, and periods when I have been lax. In many ways, it's like exercise--such as jogging. If I keep it up and don't miss a day, jogging is exhilarating, and I feel good most of the time. When I slip back into sloth and keep putting these sessions off, it becomes increasingly hard to resume the activity. Neglect of Step Ten produces creeping confusion, and life loses its zest.

At such times, I'm forced to look around at my AA acquaintances. I note that those who regularly practice Step Ten can determine with very little trouble what *other* Step is indicated to bring them again into a happier frame of mind and into serenity and comfortable sobriety.

L.H., North Hollywood, CA

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10th Step Guidelines

"When evening comes, perhaps just before going to sleep, many of us draw up a balance sheet for the day." (12& 12, p. 93)

It's a good idea to start with a prayer. For example, one might begin with the following:

"God, please help me review my day. Please grant me the willingness to see what you would have me see, in the light you would have me see it, free from morbid reflection, fear, obsessive guilt, and dishonesty."

The following guide is drawn verbatim from *Alcoholics Anonymous* (pp. 84-86):

1. Was I resentful?
2. Selfish?
3. Dishonest?
4. Afraid?
5. Do I owe an apology?
6. Have I kept something to myself which should be discussed with another person at once?
7. Was I kind and loving toward all?
8. What could I have done better?
9. Was I thinking of myself most of the time?
10. Or was I thinking of what I could do for others, what I could pack into the mainstream of life?
11. After making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken.

At all times we continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear.

When these crop up we:

1. Ask God at once to remove them.
2. Discuss them with someone immediately.
3. Make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone.
4. Then resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help.

"Having so considered our day, not omitting to take due note of things well done, and having searched our hearts with neither fear nor favor, we can truly thank God for the blessings we have received and sleep in good conscience." (12&12 p. 95)

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A DATE WITH DESTINY

Somebody once said, "As much as you may grow, as many recoveries as there may be, I think the eventual by-products of A.A. will be greater than A.A. itself."

Everywhere now, we hear such remarks. They come from all kinds of people. Doctors think of applying our methods to other neurotics; clergymen wonder if our humble example may not vitalize their congregations; businessmen find we make good personnel managers--they glimpse a new industrial democracy; educators see power in our non-controversial way of presenting the truth; and our friends wistfully say, "We wish we were alcoholics--we need A.A. too."

Why these stirrings? They must all mean, I am sure, that we have suddenly become much more than recovered alcoholics, A.A. members only. Society has begun to hope that we are going to utilize, in every walk of life, that miraculous experience of our returning, almost overnight, from the fearsome land of Nowhere.

Yes, we are again citizens of the world. It is a distraught world, very tired, very uncertain. It has worshipped its own self-sufficiency--and that has failed. We A.A.s are a people who once did that very thing. That philosophy failed us, too. So perhaps, here and there, our example of recovery can help. As individuals, we have a responsibility, may be a *double responsibility*. It may be that we have a date with destiny.

An example: Not long ago Dr. E. M. Jellinek, of Yale University, came to us. He said, "Yale, as you know, is sponsoring a program of public education on alcoholism, entirely non-controversial in character. We need the cooperation of many A.A.s. To proceed on any educational project concerning alcoholism without the goodwill, experience and help of A.A. members would be unthinkable."

So, when the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism was formed, an A.A. member was made its executive director: Marty M., one of our oldest and finest. In this issue, she tells *The Grapevine* of her new work. As a member of A.A., she is just as much interested in us as before--A.A. is still her avocation. But as an officer of the Yale-sponsored National Committee, she is also interested in educating the general public on alcoholism. Her A.A. training has wonderfully fitted her for this post in a different field. Public education on alcoholism is to be her vocation.

Could an A.A. do such a job? At first, Marty herself wondered. She asked her A.A. friends, "Will I be regarded as a professional?" Her friends replied, "Had you come to us, Marty, proposing to be a therapist, to sell straight A.A. to alcoholics at so much a customer, we should certainly have branded that as professionalism. So would everybody else.

"But the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism is quite another matter. You will be taking your natural abilities and A.A. experience into a very different field. We don't see how that can affect your amateur status with us. Suppose you were to become a social worker, a personnel officer, the manager of a state farm for alcoholics, or even a minister of the Gospel? Who could possibly say those activities would make you a professional A.A.? No one, of course."

They went on, "Yet we do hope that A.A. as a whole will never deviate from its sole purpose of helping other alcoholics. *As an organization*, we should express no opinions save on the recovery of problem drinkers. That very sound national policy has kept us out of much useless trouble already, and will surely forestall untold complications in the future.

"Though A.A. as a whole," they continued, "should never have but one objective, we believe just as strongly that for *the individual there should be no limitations whatever, except his own conscience*. He should have the complete right to choose his own opinions and outside activities. If these are good, A.A.s everywhere will approve. Just so, Marty, do we think it will be in your case. While Yale is your actual sponsor, we feel sure that you are going to have the warm personal support of thousands of A.A.s wherever you go. We shall all be thinking how much better a break this new generation of potential alcoholic kids will have because of your work, how much it might have meant to us had our own mothers and fathers really understood alcoholism." Personally I feel that Marty's friends have advised her wisely; that they have clearly distinguished between the limited scope of "A.A. as a whole" and the broad horizon of the individual A.A. acting on his own responsibility; that they have probably drawn a correct line between what we would regard as professional and amateur.

Bill W.

Central Office Notes

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ANARCHY MELTS

It may be that Alcoholics Anonymous is a new form of human society.

The first of our 12 Points of A.A. Tradition states, "Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward". This is a recognition, common in all forms of society, that the individual must sometimes place the welfare of his fellows ahead of his own uncontrolled desires. Were the individual to yield nothing to the common welfare there could be no society at all--only self-will run riot; anarchy in the worst sense of that word.

Apparent Contradiction

Yet Point Three in our A.A. Tradition looks like a wide-open invitation to anarchy. Seemingly, it contradicts Point One. It reads, "Our membership ought to include all who suffer alcoholism. Hence *we may refuse none* who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership *ever depend on money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. Group*". This clearly implies that an alcoholic is a member if *he* says so; that we can't deny him his membership; that we can't demand from him a cent; that we can't force our beliefs or practices upon him; that he may flout everything we stand for and still be a member. In fact, our Tradition carries the principle of independence for the individual to such an apparently fantastic length that, 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 A.A. Group if *they think so!*

Our non-alcoholic friends sometimes exclaim, "Did we hear you say that A.A. has a sound social structure? You must be joking. To us, your Tradition Number Three looks about as firmly grounded as the Tower of Babel. In your Point One you plainly say that group welfare comes first. Then you evidently proceed, in Point Three, to tell every A.A. that nobody can stop him if he thinks and does exactly what he pleases! True enough, your Second Point speaks vaguely about an *ultimate authority*, 'A loving God as he may express himself in our Group conscience'. With all deference to your views, that Point does look just a little impractical to outsiders. After all, the whole world today is but the sad story of how most men have lost their conscience and so cannot find their way. Now come you alcoholics (unstable people, too, you'll admit) and you blandly tell us: (1) That A.A. is a beautiful socialism--most democratic. (2) That A.A. is also a dictatorship, its members subject to the benign rule of God. And finally, (3) That A.A. is so very individualistic that the organization cannot discipline its own members for misbehavior or unbelief.

Crucifix of Our Credo

"So," continue our friends, "within the society of Alcoholics Anonymous it appears to us that you have a democracy, a dictatorship and an anarchy, all functioning at once. Do these sleep quietly in the same bed--these same concepts whose conflict is tearing apart our world of today? Yet we know that A.A. works. So you people must have somehow become reconciled to these great forces. Tell us, if you can, what holds A.A. together? Why doesn't A.A. tear apart, too? If each A.A. has personal liberty which can amount to license, why doesn't your A.A. society blow up? It ought to, yet it doesn't."

Our friends of the world outside, so puzzled over this paradox, are apt to miss a most significant statement as they read our Point One. It is this: "A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die."

That stark assertion carries a world of meaning for every member of Alcoholics Anonymous. While it is perfectly true that no A.A. group can possibly coerce an alcoholic to contribute money, to conform to the 12 Steps of our Recovery Program or to the 12 Points of A.A. Tradition, each A.A. member is, nevertheless, most powerfully compelled, in the long run, to do these very things. The truth is, that in the life of each A.A. member, there still lurks a tyrant. His name is Alcohol. He is cunning, ruthless. And his weapons are misery, insanity and death. No matter how long we may be sober, he always stands at each man's elbow, ever watchful of an opportunity to resume his destruction. Like an agent of the Gestapo he ever threatens each A.A. citizen with torture or extinction. Unless, of course, the A.A. citizen is willing to live unselfishly, often placing the welfare of A.A. as a whole ahead of his own personal plans and ambitions. Apparently no human being can force alcoholics to live happily and usefully together. But Mr. John Barleycorn can--and he often does!

Rugged Souls Return

A story will illustrate: Some time ago we made a long list of our seeming failures in the first years of A.A. Every alcoholic on the list had been given a good exposure. Most of them had attended A.A. meetings for several months. After slipping and sliding around they had all disappeared. Some said they were not alcoholic. Others couldn't stand for our belief in God. Many had developed intense resentments toward their fellows. Anarchists at heart, they could not conform to our society. And because our society did not conform to them, they quit. *But only temporarily*. Over the years, most of these so-called failures have returned, often becoming magnificent members. We never ran after them; they returned of their own accord. Each time I spot one newly back, I ask him why he has rejoined our fold. Invariably his answer runs like this: "When I first contacted A.A. I learned that alcoholism is a disease; an obsession of the mind that compels us to drink, and a sensitivity of the body that condemns us to go mad or die if we keep on. I also learned that A.A. worked, at

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least for some alcoholics. But I then disliked A.A. methods, hated some of the alcoholics I met there and I still toyed with the idea that I could do the job of quitting all by myself. After several more years of terrible drinking, which I found I was powerless to control, I gave up. I returned to A.A. because it was the only place left to go; I'd tried everything else. Arrived at this point, I knew that I must act quickly; that I must adopt the 12 Steps of the A.A. Recovery Program; that I must cease hating my fellow alcoholics; that I must now take my place among them as a very small part of that great whole, the society of Alcoholics Anonymous. It all boiled down to a simple question of 'do or die'. I had to conform to A.A. principles--or else. No more anarchy for me. So I'm back."

This illustration shows why we of A.A. must hang together "or else hang separately." We are players at a stern drama where death is the prompter to those who falter. Could anyone imagine a more powerful restraint upon us than this?

Yet the history of uncontrolled drinking shows that fear alone has chastened but few alcoholics. Much more than fear is needed to bind us anarchists together. Several years ago, speaking at Baltimore, I ran on at a great rate about the terrible sufferings we alcoholics had endured. My talk must have had a strong flavor of self pity and exhibitionism. I kept referring to our drinking experience as a great calamity, a terrible misfortune. After the meeting I was approached by a Catholic clergyman who genially remarked, "I heard you say you thought your drinking a great misfortune. But it seems to me that in your case it was your *great good fortune*. Was not this terrible experience the very thing which humbled you so completely that you were able to find God? Did not suffering open your eyes and your heart? All the opportunity you have today, all this wonderful experience you call A.A., once had its beginnings in deep personal suffering. In your case that was actually no misfortune. It was your great good fortune. You A.A.s are a privileged people."

Searching the Motives

That simple yet profound remark affected me deeply. It is a landmark in my life. It set me thinking as never before about my relationship to my fellow A.A.s. It caused me to question my own motives. "Why had I come to Baltimore anyway? Had I come only to enjoy the applause and approval of my fellows? Was I there as a teacher or a preacher? Did I fancy myself a great moral crusader?" On reflection, I shamefacedly admitted to myself that I had all these motives, that I had been taking a vicarious and rather self-centered enjoyment out of my visit. But was that all? Had I no better motive than my natural craving for prestige and applause? Had I come to Baltimore in response to no better or deeper need than that? Then followed a flash of realization. Underneath my shallow and childish vainglory I saw Someone much greater than I at work! Someone who sought

to transform me; who would, if I permitted, sweep away my less worthy desires and replace them with truer aspirations. In these I might, were I humble enough, find peace.

At that moment I saw ever so clearly why I really should have come to Baltimore. I should have journeyed there with the happy conviction that I needed the Baltimoreans even more than they needed me; that I needed to share with them both their burdens and their joys; that I needed to feel at one with them, merging myself into their society; that even if they did insist on thinking me their teacher, I should actually feel myself their pupil. I saw that I had been living too much alone, too much aloof from my fellows, and too deaf to that Voice within. Instead of coming to Baltimore as a simple agent bearing the message of experience, I had come as a founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. And, like a salesman at a convention, I had been wearing my identification badge so that all might well see it. How much better it would have been, had I felt *gratitude* rather than self satisfaction--*gratitude* that I had once suffered the pains of alcoholism, *gratitude* that a miracle of recovery had been worked upon me from above, *gratitude* for the privilege of serving my fellow alcoholics and *gratitude* for those fraternal ties which bound me ever closer to them in a comradeship such as few societies of men have ever known. Truly did the clergyman say, "Your misfortune has become your good fortune. You A.A.s are a privileged people."

Anarchy Melts

My experience at Baltimore was not unique. Every A.A. has such spiritual landmarks in his life--moments of insight which draw him closer to his fellows and to his Maker. The cycle is ever the same. First we turn to A.A. because we may die if we don't. Next, we depend upon its fellowship and philosophy to stop our drinking. Then, for a time, we tend once more to depend upon ourselves, seeking happiness through power and acclaim. Finally, some incident, perhaps a sharp reverse, opens our eyes still wider. Then, as we learn our new lesson and *really accept its teaching* we enter a new level of better feeling and doing. Life takes on a finer meaning. We glimpse realities new to us; we apprehend the kind of love which assures us that it is more blessed to give than to receive. These are some of the reasons why we think that Alcoholics Anonymous may be a new form of society.

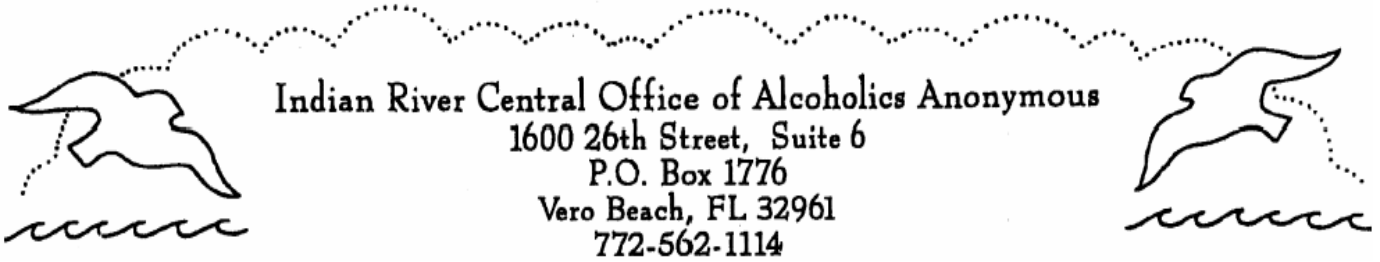
Each A.A. Group is a safe haven. But it is always circumscribed, however, by the tyrant Alcohol. Like the men on Eddie Rickenbacker's raft, we who live in the haven of A.A. cling together with an intensity of purpose which the outside world seldom comprehends. The anarchy of the individual melts away. Self love subsides and democracy becomes a reality. We begin to know true freedom of the spirit. The awareness grows that all is well; that each of us may implicitly trust in Him who is our loving Guide from within--and from above.

Bill W.

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