

[Big Book Study] How Our Study Works 34

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Welcome everyone!

We've just completed our last cycle and we will start from the Title page and work our way through to Doctor Bob's story once again. The next cycle begins today Wednesday, February 4th. Each weekday morning at or before 8:00am Eastern Time I will post the section of the book we will review for the day. We will begin with the title page and work our way through to the end of Doctor Bob's Nightmare. With each post we will try to get to the core meaning of each passage, we'll examine the history and try to provide some historical context. We will examine each of the steps as presented in the book and Bill's writing style.

After I post the daily study people are free to read it, respond to it and/or ask questions. (both http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BBS_Open_Discussion on Yahoo! and <http://groups.msn.com/AABeginnersClub> are interactive - the bigbookmeeting (this group) located on Yahoo at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bigbookmeeting> is a newsletter style study and is not interactive) If you want to ask me a question off of the board drop me a line at jknyc@hotmail.com.

The cycle takes about 40 posts and eight weeks to complete. We have a great time and learn alot about the book from which we took our name as a Fellowship.

My good friend honey_dot_com will assist throughout this cycle -

When I take time off during the cycle, Honey will post in my absence - My thanks in advance to her!!!

About me-

I got sober with "The Cops and Robbers" in northern Westchester County at the old Mt. Kisco Crow Hill Group on August 8, 1980. I was 17 years old when I came in and I have been sober ever since. I was directed to the Big Book and told "that if it ain't in the book it ain't AA". I've been a champion of the Big Book through my time in Alcoholics Anonymous. (I was also told I was too sick to comprehend the 12 and 12....they were right).

I now live in Bronxville, in southern Westchester county, just north of New York City with my wonderfully supportive wife (who seems to practice these principles better than many alcoholics - even though

she is a non-alcoholic). As coincidence would have it, we once lived on West 89th Street in Manhattan just half a block from the location of what was Towns Hospital (293 Central Park West) site of Bill's "White Light" experience.

I have a satisfying career in commercial property management and wonderful relationships with people throughout my life. I am a fully satisfied customer of AA. There is alot more but, in the interest of brevity, I'll quit there.

Enjoy the study and pass these links on to your friends:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bigbookmeeting>

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BBS_Open_Discussion

<http://groups.msn.com/AABeginnersClub>

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/We_Have_Recovered

Thanks to all of you this study is a resounding success and has been for well over three years.

Oh, and our next face to face event will be at the Wilson House in East Dorset, VT. Dave McD (yeah_but_2001) and I will host another Big Book Seminar weekend - "The Big Book Comes

Alive with Jim and Dave" It will be held the weekend of April 17-18, 2004! Call 802 362- 5524 for reservation information.

We're going to be going to Tucson, AZ in September - watch for updates!

Jim K -

Recovered Alcoholic

The Into Action Group of Manhattan, NY

Subject: [Big Book Study] Big Book Study Post #1

Welcome everyone to the newest cycle of our Big Book Study! We'll be examining the book very closely throughout the coming weeks. It is important to note that we will examine this book from the standpoint of a textbook.

I always like to note at this juncture that the title page has the following subtitle:

"The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism", yes - Recovered! Now that usually opens a seething cauldron of debate ie: "Recovering" vs. "Recovered". The reason I bring this up here is it is important to note that lasting recovery (Recovered) is the result of what our book presents. Whether one calls him/herself a "recovered-" or "recovering-" alcoholic is of no consequence in this study. We will limit our discussion to the text.

That debate® rages on at from time to time at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/recoveredalcoholics> (That is, if you care to get involved in it).

Turning the page to Roman Numeral v, the table of contents, let's see how the book was laid out.

Bill was an educated and intelligent man. He was always taught to avoid repeating himself.

However, he also knew that he would have to make the same point repeatedly, but in several different ways in order to get the point across. The format of our book is very much like that of a textbook in this way.

The Doctor's Opinion and Bill's Story identify what the problem is: "Powerlessness", and covers Step 1. The Doctor's Opinion, written by Dr. Willam D. Silkworth, the doctor who treated Bill at Towns Hospital (293 Central Park West at 89th Street in Manhattan) was a part of the main text in the first edition of the book. It was put into the Roman Numerals in the second edition on the advice of literary experts of the time. (And, unfortunately, who reads those Roman Numerals anyway!?) The letter he provided was unsigned at the time of the first edition as well. Dr. Silkworth was concerned about his medical standing back in 1938 or so - the ideas were so radical at the time that he was concerned about being ridiculed about his ideas on alcoholism. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 identify "The Solution", that we need "Power" and cover Step 2.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 identify the Necessary Actions" to find that "Power" and goes into the detail of Steps 3 thru 12.

Tomorrow we will begin on Roman Numeral xi the Preface to the Third edition.

Jim

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Big Book Study Post #2

Let's turn to page xi, the Preface to the Third Edition, and look at paragraph #2. This book is identified as "the basic text for our Society." A basic text is a book which can convey knowledge – in other words, a text book.

Turn to page xiii, the Foreword to the First Edition. The first paragraph is where we want to draw our attention. Bill realized that there is strength in the collective voice. Hence, "... are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered..." (There's that word again!) The fact of the matter is that we are more likely to listen to one hundred than to just a single voice. "To show other alcoholics **PRECISELY HOW WE HAVE RECOVERED** is the main purpose of this book." A powerful statement! Note that the capitalized words in the sentence above were capitalized in the first edition of the book. Subsequent editions italicized these words. I'll have to use caps instead of italics when adding emphasis where the book does.

I look forward to it every time I see my Aunt Pat out in Newton, New Jersey. She makes a wonderful strawberry hortcake. After years of visits I finally asked her for the recipe which she gladly gave to me. I went home, followed the directions as they were written and viola! the strawberry shortcake I have always loved!

Then my ego gets involved. I think a little more sugar in the whipped cream would improve it. Maybe frozen strawberries. Or let's use Cool Whip® instead of real whipped cream. I make the cake using my version and it isn't anywhere near as good, in fact I am disappointed.

The Big Book shows us the specific recipe for sobriety and, if we follow it carefully, we will get all the benefits of The AA Program. If we change the recipe we will get something else and we will be greatly disappointed.

Tomorrow, we will go to page xv - the Foreword to the Second Edition. Thanks again, and don't forget to pass it on!

The Big Book online with page numbers can be found at <http://www.aainsa.org/bigbook/>

Jim

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Post 3

Good morning everyone, welcome to those who have just joined us-

Turning to page xv and reading through to the end of the foreword to the second edition we have a brief history of AA presented. At the top of page xvi the "alcoholic friend" was Ebby Thatcher, sober two months in the Oxford Groups. The Oxford Groups were a fundamentalist Christian movement that sought to practice the principles of first century Christianity. Vestiges of this movement survive to this day although the movement has experienced many transformations and is no longer called the Oxford Groups or Movement. Dr. William D.

Silkworth is the physician who introduced Bill to the allergy theory and the mental obsession of alcoholism. Bill and Dr. Bob Smith met at Henrietta Sieberling's house (of the Sieberling rubber and tire family) through an introduction by Rev. Walter Tunks. When Bill was pacing up and down the hotel lobby of the Mayflower Hotel in Akron he was trying to choose between going to the bar and scraping up an acquaintance or search for an alcoholic to help. Fortunately for all of us he looked at the Church Register. He picked Rev. Tunks' name because it was an unusual name and he had a thing for unusual names. Turns out that Rev. Tunks was a member of the Oxford Group in the Akron area and steered Bill toward Dr. Bob Smith through Henrietta Sieberling. Dr. Bob was also involved with the Oxford Group, though still unable to stop drinking. The first time the two of them met they spoke for five hours, and this after Bob had elicited a promise from his wife Anne that the meeting would last no more than 15 minutes.

Paragraph 1, page xvii - AA number three was named Bill Dotson - "the man on the bed". When Bill and Bob approached Bill Dotson in the hospital they had him moved from the ward to a private room known as "The Flower Room". The only people who had private rooms in hospitals in those days were the rich or, in the case of "The Flower Room", the people about to die. Bill D., being destitute, thought he was dying after being brought to "The Flower Room", maybe it helped Bill and Bob carry the message to him.

Keep in mind that the book hasn't been written yet and Bill and Bob would work through the next couple of years carrying the message.

They used the Oxford Groups Four Absolutes; Absolute Love, Purity, Unselfishness and Honesty. Tall order for any alcoholic. It wasn't until the "Drunk Squad" of the Oxford Groups separated from the Oxford Groups, starting in New York, in 1937-8 that AA itself became a separate entity. The first meeting to be called "a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous" was held in Cleveland under the auspices of Clarence S. in 1939.

More on the foreword to the second edition and the beginning of the Doctor's Opinion on Monday.

Jim

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Doctor's Opinion on Monday.

Big Book Study Post - #4

Good morning everyone!

We're still on page xvii of the foreword to the second edition. They describe two centers of activity around 1936. AA's group number 3 was founded in Cleveland, Clarence S. was a major factor in the success of AA in Cleveland (he started the first group to use the name "Alcoholics Anonymous"), and by late 1937 there were 40 members sober in this nameless group of drunks. Bill returned to Akron and, with 18 others, decided to: (1) open a chain of hospitals, (2) use paid missionaries to spread the word, and (3) write a book.

Up until this time the society was nameless. In the process of writing the book and naming it (1938), our Fellowship received its name. There were several titles being considered for the book: "The Way Out," "100 Men," "Comes the Dawn," among others. (We could have been known as "Way Outs" instead of AAs!) They settled on "Alcoholics Anonymous" and our society took the title of the book to be the name of our fellowship.

Turning to page xix, paragraph 1, the evolution of the 12 Traditions is described and confirmed in 1950. At the top of page xx we see the statistics of success: "50% got sober at once and remained that way; 25% sobered up after some relapses...". Can we boast of such numbers today?

The Doctor's Opinion - page xxiii (Page xxv in the 4th Edition) was originally found on page 1 of the main text in 1939 when the first edition of the book was published. It was moved to the section preceding the main section of the text in the second edition because of comment from literary figures. The patient described in paragraph 2 of the letter is Bill Wilson in November of 1934 at Towns Hospital. The doctor is William D. Silkworth, "the little doctor who loved drunks," who treated cocaine addicts and alcoholics.

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

To Whom It May Concern:

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

In late 1934 I attended a patient who, though he had been a competent business man of good earning capacity, was an alcoholic of a type I had come to regard as hopeless.

In the course of his third treatment he acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. As part of his rehabilitation he commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing upon them that they must do likewise with still others. This has become the basis of a rapidly growing fellowship of these men and their families. This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered.

I personally know scores of cases who were of the type with whom other methods had failed completely.

These facts appear to be of extreme medical importance; because of the extraordinary possibilities of rapid growth inherent in this group they may mark a new epoch in the annals of alcoholism. These men may well have a remedy for thousands of such situations.

You may rely absolutely on anything they say about themselves.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) - - - -M.D."

At the end of the letter on page xxiv, Dr. Silkworth DID NOT SIGN the letter in the first edition of the book. With our next post we'll go into why he didn't sign that letter.

Tomorrow we'll start from the end of that letter on page xxiv (Page xxvi in the 4th Edition) and probably finish the Doctor's Opinion.

Jim

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Big Book Study Post - #5

Good morning!

We're at paragraph 1, page xxiv, right after the first letter. "...the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind." This was a radical idea for 1935. The primary reason for the lack of signature by Dr. Silkworth was his reluctance to face his peers with such radical ideas; it was The Depression and he, too, was lucky to have a position. Further down it is restated, "...any picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete."

Throughout the book, Bill will restate the same idea in several different ways to reinforce the importance or significance of the idea. He does this with the allergy theory. Having an allergy means that we react abnormally to something; in this case we react abnormally to alcohol. (Some drunks claim to break out in handcuffs when drinking. Other claim to break out in strange spots - like another town, some strange neighborhood, or jail.)

Dr. Silkworth continues to expand on his ideas on page xxvi. Paragraph 2 is important here: "...the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker."

We are different than other people. Average or normal people do not develop the phenomenon of "craving." We metabolize alcohol in a different way than the "normal" drinker. They don't experience the physical craving which comes after the first drink is taken. They can have the one or two that we, as a class, cannot. They don't have the mental obsession that precedes the first drink.

Paragraph 3, at the bottom, is where "...restless, irritable and discontented" comes from. Continuing at the top of page xxvii, "the sense of ease and comfort...drinks they see others taking with impunity" (without repercussions). Normal drinkers don't have this physical malady; that's why they can drink and we can't.

The last sentence of the top paragraph gives us an example of what we will see throughout the book - what the spiritual awakening is - "...unless this person can experience an entire psychic change (also known as a "spiritual awakening") there is very little hope of his recovery."

Strong words. Over and over we will see that CHANGE is the hallmark of recovery from alcoholism.

Turn to page xxviii - Silkworth describes five types of alcoholics: "the psychopaths who are emotionally unstable..." "There is the type of man who is unwilling to admit that he cannot take a drink..." "There is the type who believes that after being entirely free from alcohol for a period of time he can take a drink without danger." "There is the manic-depressive type..." "Then there are types entirely normal in every respect except in the effect alcohol has upon them."

Here's the important point: "All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving...the manifestation of an allergy..." That first drink does get you drunk - that's the how and why of it.

Tomorrow we'll start with Chapter 1 - Bill's Story. Until then think about this: there is only one place in the main text of the Big Book where the word "pot" appears. No, it isn't the kind you smoke. What is it's meaning? We'll reveal it's meaning tomorrow.

Jim

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## Big Book Study - Post #6

Mornin' everyone!

First, let's answer that question posted yesterday concerning "Pot" in the Big Book. Here it is, on the old doggerel--the way Bill remembered it (an abbreviated version):

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

Beer or ale was sold by the "pot" or small cask hundreds of years ago.

Bill's Story, page 1 - Bill's Story was put into the book as a means of identifying an example of the disease in action and to outline the spiritual experience.

Bill was born in East Dorset, Vermont in 1895 and was brought up primarily by his grandfather. You can visit the Wilson House in East Dorset and actually stay there. Bill and Lois are buried nearby. He served in World War I and, during the Roaring 20's he discovered Wall Street. The profit he speaks of on page 3 was a sizable sum in those days.

At this point in his story, he still has no clue of his alcoholism. He begins to have an inkling near the bottom of page 3: "My drinking assumed more serious proportions, continuing all day and almost every night. The remonstrances of my friends terminated in a row and I became a lone wolf."

His friends questioned his drinking; that's a sin in every alcoholic's book! Who needs them, right? He began to drink alone.

Bill continued to ride the bull market of the 1920's, but in 1929 the market crashed. Although he was disgusted by those jumping out of the windows of high finance, he would just get drunk. At the last paragraph of page 4 Bill is handed an ego puncturing - "We went to live with my wife's parents." [At 182 Clinton Street in Brooklyn]. That would crush most egos and Bill had quite an ego when he made all that money. By now Bill has no illusion. He is a drunk existing to drink. At the second half of page 5 he has lost all control. He knew he couldn't "take so much as one drink." He marshaled his willpower and what happened? He drank again! No effective mental defense against the first drink. Willpower was no match for the mental obsession to drink. At the top of page 7, it is now the summer of 1933. His brother-in-law is Dr. Leonard Strong. The hospital was Towns Hospital at 293 Central Park West (at 89th Street) on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The Belladonna treatment refers to treatment with a drug derived from the nightshade family of plants and similar in effect to valium. Hydrotherapy is shower and bath therapy (you do get a clean alcoholic that way!). Most importantly he meets Dr. William D. Silkworth for the first time. Bill begins to gain an insight into his disease, and a little self-knowledge.

Did it work? During the summer of 1934 it did not. He got drunk again and it got even worse. Bill is without hope: powerless. The miracle is just around the corner.

Tomorrow, we'll start on page 8 with paragraph 1.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #7

Good morning and a Happy Good Friday to everyone!

We're at the top of page 8, Paragraph 1: "No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretches around me in all directions. I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master."

That sounds like someone who has been defeated-given up-surrendered (Step 1). He leaves the hospital in September and stays sober to the beginning of November of 1934.

Armistice Day rolls around, November 11, 1934. Bill takes a bus to go golfing on Staten Island (See "AA Comes of Age," page 56). The bus he is riding on has a fender-bender and, being the kind of guy Bill was, he and a new acquaintance alight from the bus to wait for the next one. Bill has already told his drinking experiences to this fellow: the allergy, his newly-found knowledge, etc. They get on the next bus, and get off at a country tavern near the golf course. His friend suggested a sandwich, so in they went.

The bartender buys a round on the house for Armistice Day, and Bill throws back a drink without hesitation (no effective mental defense whatsoever). His friend was mortified! "Are you crazy?!" he asked Bill in astonishment.

Bill answered, "Yes, I am." Bill stayed drunk for another month after that escapade.

A couple of weeks later, Ebby Thacher, a boyhood friend, came to visit. Ebby's father was the mayor of Albany.

Ebby was a true drunk and was always in some scrape or another. He was in trouble in Vermont. Turns out he had been painting a barn. (Honestly-how much trouble can you get in painting a barn?) He was drunk and had just finished one side when a group of pigeons flew in and perched

on top of the barn. The pigeons began to crap on the side of the barn, which infuriated Ebby. He got a shotgun and started firing away at the pigeons. I think he hit the broad side of the barn before he hit any pigeons. The incident ended in Ebby getting arrested.

Two men appeared at his hearing--Roland Hazzard and Seebury Graves, who were members of the Oxford Group, a Christian religious group that sought to practice 1st Century Christianity. They appeared in court to prevent Ebby's commitment to a mental hospital. They brought him to the Oxford Group's NY headquarters at the Calvary Mission in Manhattan, where he got sober. (We're at the bottom of page 9.)

Ebby had been sober since September when he came to visit his friend Bill. In the last full paragraph of page 9: "They told him of a simple religious idea [Step 2] and a practical program of action [in essence: Steps 3 thru 12]." Bill was already "...hopeless" (top of page 10).

Page 11, paragraph 3: "But my friend sat before me, and he made the point-blank declaration that God had done for him what he could not do for himself. ...He had admitted complete defeat." (Ebby had Step 1.)

Bill also has Step 1, and was beginning on Step 2 but there was a sticking point. Turn to page 12, paragraph 2:

"My friend suggested what seemed a novel idea. He said, "WHY DON'T YOU CHOOSE YOUR OWN CONCEPTION OF GOD?"

This is the spiritual (rather than religious) message. This is the root of Step 3's "...as we understood Him." This is the great turning point.

And, it is important to note, this was NOT the Oxford Group message. They had a very definite idea of a Christian God that they preached about.

In the next 2 paragraphs, Bill is able to take what would become Step 2. In paragraph 5, he begins to describe a spiritual structure that will be built through out the book: "Upon a foundation of complete willingness I might build what I saw in my friend." In several places in the book, he will refer to this spiritual structure painting a mental picture of recovery.

On Monday we will begin at the top of Page 13 - the last drink for Bill.

Have a good weekend!

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #8

Good morning everyone!

We're at the top of page 13-

Bill went again to Towns Hospital to be separated from alcohol for the last time. This is at the beginning of December 1934; he had stayed drunk for a month after Armistice Day. Bill's sobriety dates from December 11, 1934.

Paragraph 2 describes Steps 3, 4, 6 & 7: "There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then I understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since."

The first sentence of paragraph 3 describes Step 5, and the remainder of paragraph 3 describes Steps 8 and 9, (also known as "restitution" by the Oxford Groups): "My schoolmate [Ebby Thatcher] visited me, and I fully acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies. We made a list of people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment. I expressed my entire willingness to approach these individuals, admitting my wrong. Never was I to be critical of them. I was to right all such matters to the utmost of my ability." [Remember this sentence when we talk about amends in Chapter 6.]

Paragraph 4 - The first sentence describes Step 10 and the remainder of the paragraph goes into Step 11. The last paragraph on this page discusses the first part of Step 12:

"My friend promised that when these things were done,[not by osmosis I would guess], I would enter upon a new relationship with my Creator; that I would have the elements of a way of living which has answered all my problems." That sounds like a Spiritual Awakening, doesn't it? But don't we want all our problems solved first? It is through that spiritual awakening that they are solved.

Page 14 - Bill's "White Light Experience" is found in paragraph 2. One of the reasons that Appendix II - "Spiritual Experience" was added to the book was that many people were confused; they thought that they had to have the same type of sudden transformation that Bill had.

The concept of "carrying the message" was born with Bill while lying in that bed in Towns Hospital (see paragraph 5). The last part of Step 12 is described in the following paragraph continuing to the top of page 15: "My friend [Ebby Thatcher] had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs." For us, that means not just in the rooms of AA but everywhere.

Going on to paragraph 1 on page 15, Bill describes the dangers of "...self-pity and resentment. This sometimes nearly drove me back to drink, but I soon found that when all other measures failed, work with another alcoholic would save the day." Perhaps there is something to this "carrying the message" stuff after all!

Bill went on to work with drunks and barely earning a living. Not only was he not making any money, he also had no success in sobering up drunks. Lois was working at Macy's. Ebby moved from Rev. Sam Shoemaker's Calvary Church mission and in with Bill and Lois at 182 Clinton St. in Brooklyn at this time.

It wasn't until May, 1935 (six months later) that Bill had any success at all: carrying the message to Doctor Bob Smith, aside from staying sober himself. More details are available in "AA Comes of Age," pages 52-77, which tells Bill's story in greater detail--how he met Bob, how they helped Bill Dotson (AA number 3) get sober, and the early days of what was to become AA.

Tomorrow we will begin Chapter 2 on Page 17: "There is a Solution."

Have a great day!

Jim

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Big Book Study Post - #9

<http://www.c1tracking.com/l.asp?cid=5511>

Good Morning!

We're on page 17 - Chapter 2 - "There is a Solution"

One of the literary devices that Bill employs on this page relates to events that are familiar to the reader. Remember that the book was published in 1939 when the memory of the Titanic was still a relatively recent one for many. "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."

Now here's the message that Bill and the first one hundred wanted to pass on: "But that in itself would never have held us together as we re now joined."

So, what is it that binds us together? Look at the following paragraph: "...we have discovered a common solution [a spiritual awakening through the 12 Steps]. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action."

It is The Program of action that binds us together.

Page 20, paragraph 1 - "Doubtless you are curious to discover how and why, in the face of expert opinion to the contrary, we have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body."

The top of the next paragraph is the answer: "It is the purpose of this book to answer such questions specifically." In other words, we should be using this book as a text book or set of directions for in these pages we will be shown how to get, and stay, sober.

The following four paragraphs go on to describe the misconceptions of alcoholism held by the public at large and to describe people who drink that we are not: moderate drinkers or certain types of hard drinkers.

Page 21 - "The real alcoholic" - in paragraph 1, Bill discusses the craving and lack of control that the real alcoholic develops. This repeats ideas presented in "The Doctor's Opinion."

Turn to page 22 paragraph 2 - Here the powerlessness and insanity of alcoholism is defined.

"What has become of the common sense and will power that he still sometimes displays with respect to other matters?" In short, the human will is not operative, we drink continuing to expect different results. Alcoholics do not have the power of choice - common sense and willpower are useless.

What is it that causes alcoholics to drink when they don't want to? Broken shoelace? Not enough meetings? Page 23, paragraph 1 - "These observations would be academic and pointless if our friend never took the first drink, thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. Therefore, the main problem of the alcoholic centers in the mind rather than in his body." It is our struggle with the mental obsession that we will lose that causes us to drink; the circumstances themselves matter little.

Turning to page 24, we have italicized writing, used sparsely in the book, always used to emphasize a point. In paragraph 1 - "The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically nonexistent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first drink."

The following paragraph - "There is the complete failure of the kind of defense that keeps one from putting his hand on a hot stove."

Let's pause here to consider this: How many times has this point, the lack of common sense regarding alcohol or the lack of defense against the first drink, been made?

We must also note that in the last paragraph on page 24 we are told that the alcoholic "...has probably placed himself beyond human aid... ." Is fellowship enough? Going to meetings morning, noon, and night? Talking to a sponsor everyday? Daily telephone calls?

Here's our situation: The mental obsession to drink is relentless; human power is ineffective against it. What will help us to overcome this obsession and prevent us from picking up the first drink?

More tomorrow!

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #10

Turning our books to Page 25, lets look at paragraph 2: "The great fact is just this, and nothing less: That we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences\* which have revolutionized (changed) 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 which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves."

This is the solution and this is what the solution has done - we have changed our entire outlook. The asterisk (\*) refers us to Appendix II which was added to the book after the first printing of the first edition to clarify the spiritual experience.

The text goes on - paragraph 2: "If you are as seriously alcoholic as we were, we believe that there is no middle of the road solution."

Let's review for a minute: "no middle of the road solution" - we aren't doing this thing "cafeteria style" or taking what we like and leaving the rest.

"We were in a position where life was becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there is no return through human aid, we had but two alternatives: One was to go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could; and

the other, to accept spiritual help. This we did because we honestly wanted to, and were willing to make the effort." We're given two choices: Keep drinking or accept spiritual help. So, will meetings everyday suffice? Therapy? Calling a sponsor everyday? Daily exercise? Yoga? Probably not.

Page 26 paragraph 1: The certain American business man was Roland Hazard. He worked with Dr. Carl Jung for an entire year. (It's interesting to note that Carl Jung was Roland's third choice - Sigmund Freud [a one time cocaine proponent] was too busy and Alfred Adler was too sick to work with him). Jung tells him he is hopeless, (paragraph 3), but the doctor also knows what he needs (paragraph 3 on page 27): "here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences... They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements (change). Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men were suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them." Another description of the spiritual awakening from Dr. Carl Jung with "change" being the overall theme.

So, this chapter was aptly named "There is a Solution" and it has been hammered home to us that the solution is CHANGE. That change is the spiritual awakening. Go to the top of page 60 for a minute:

"12. Having had a spiritual awakening as THE result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs" (emphasis on "THE" is mine).

The solution is a spiritual awakening (see Chapter 2), the result of these steps is a spiritual awakening (Step 12), so the steps are the solution! It's simple, it really is.

Tomorrow we will begin with Chapter 3 "More About Alcoholism" on page 30.

Jim

## Big Book Study - Post #11

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Welcome back everyone-

We're at Page 30 - Chapter 3 "More (Truth) About Alcoholism". This is where we will discuss, in depth, the state of mind that precedes the first drink. Let's take the time to examine what "Insanity" in this context means. It means: less than whole, not necessarily crazy, an inability to see the truth in life. Conversely, "Sanity" on the other hand means with a complete or whole mind - an ability to see the truth in life.

"No person likes to think that he is bodily or mentally different from his fellows". This is a truth most of us had been unwilling to accept. Now here is the real insanity: "The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker" This is the great lie that we pursue, this is the mental obsession. To accomplish this we try a myriad of different formulas with the same result. An inability to see the truth in life? - you bet! "The persistence of this illusion (untruth) is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death". Next paragraph - "The delusion (untruth) that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed". Non-alcoholics don't break out in handcuffs when they drink. They are able to metabolize alcohol where the alcoholic can't.

On pages 32 to 43 four examples of the state of mind that precedes the first drink will be illustrated. Bill's writing style is one where the same point will be made repeatedly to reinforce that point. It is important to note that he is spending an entire chapter on Step 2's insanity. It is very important that we understand the state of mind that precedes the first drink - the insanity of alcoholism.

Paragraph 2, page 32 - Example #1 is "A Man of Thirty". The points Bill brings up are these: "Once he started he had no control whatever". Using will power he quit but here was the insane idea: "Then he fell victim to the belief which practically every alcoholic has - that his long period of sobriety and self-discipline had qualified him to drink as other men". This man was dead by the next paragraph. At paragraph 1 on page 33 Bill utilizes his other literary device - he

summarizes: (This is the "Pickle theory") ... "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'. You can make a pickle out of a cucumber but the process cannot be reversed.

Page 34, paragraph 2 - Here is the paragraph which discusses the efficacy of using willpower to stop drinking. The cunning, baffling and powerful nature of our disease usually torpedoes any effort based on willpower.

Tomorrow we will start us out with the second of the four examples "Jim the Car Salesman" and we'll begin on page 35 -paragraph 2.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #12

Good Morning all!

Paragraph 2 - Page 35: "Jim the car salesman" is example number 2 of alcoholic insanity.

Reading through paragraph 3 on this page: "We told him what we knew of alcoholism and the answer we had found. He made a beginning."

"Making a beginning" means he had completed the first three steps. "His family was re-assembled, and he began to work as a salesman for the business he had lost through drinking." There is a situation ripe for a resentment. "All went well for a time, but he failed to enlarge on his spiritual life." He didn't continue on with the rest of the program - Steps 4-12. He got drunk again, and here's how: Page 36 paragraph 1 - "I remember I felt irritated (resentful) that I had to be a salesman for a concern I once owned. I had a few words with the boss...", expressing his resentment no doubt! He continues in this paragraph to be sane, but watch out! Next paragraph - all italics. The insane thought -**SUDDENLY THE THOUGHT CROSSED MY MIND THAT IF I WERE TO PUT AN OUNCE OF WHISKEY IN MY MILK IT COULDN'T HURT ME ON A FULL STOMACH.**" The insane idea was followed by action. Paragraph 4 - "Thus started one more journey to the asylum (treatment center) for Jim... **HE HAD MUCH KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HIMSELF AS AN ALCOHOLIC. (Which did him no good whatsoever) YET ALL REASONS FOR NOT DRINKING WERE EASILY PUSHED ASIDE IN FAVOR OF THE FOOLISH (insane) IDEA THAT HE COULD TAKE WHISKEY IF ONLY HE MIXED IT WITH MILK!**" Page 37 - "Whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call this plain insanity. How can such a lack of proportion, of the ability to think straight, be called anything else?" This is where the Big Book defines the "insanity" of Step 2 as the state of mind that precedes the first drink.

Our next example starts at the bottom of page 37, paragraph 4 - "The Jaywalker." Read it through to the end of the second paragraph on the following page. Although it seems ridiculous it is a fine example of our state of mind.

Our last example is "Fred the Accountant". Go to page 39, paragraph 2. At the bottom of the page - "Fred would not believe himself an alcoholic, (Step 1) much less accept a spiritual remedy (Step 2) for his problem." Reading through to the end of this paragraph at the top of page 40 it is clear that he also believes in self-knowledge. He tells what happened beginning at paragraph 3 on page 40. Almost immediately he is wrestling with the mental obsession. Page 41 - paragraph 1 - Here is the insane idea: "I went to my hotel room and leisurely dressed for dinner. **AS I CROSSED THE THRESHOLD OF THE DINING ROOM, THE THOUGHT CAME TO MIND THAT IT WOULD BE NICE TO HAVE A COUPLE OF COCKTAILS WITH DINNER (and return to the mental hospital). THAT WAS ALL. NOTHING MORE.**" Next paragraph "...I HAD MADE NO FIGHT WHATEVER AGAINST THE FIRST DRINK." Self knowledge fails again. He clearly demonstrates that we have no effective mental defense against the first drink. Bill's summary, last paragraph on page 43 - "Once more: The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink. Except in rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a Higher Power." This is

a very important point: This means that we can have all the self knowledge we can get but still drink. It also means that human power, our own or others (fellowship), will not help us. Finding God will.

On Monday we start my favorite chapter in the Big Book: Chapter 4 "We Agnostics" on page 44.  
Jim

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Subject: [Big Book Study] Big Book Study - Post #13

Today we are at Chapter 4 - We Agnostics, Page 44.

We should start by defining some terms. "Agnostic" is comprised of two parts - "Ag" which is the Greek for "Without" and "nostic" which is "Knowledge." With this in mind our definition of "Agnostic" is: Without Knowledge of God. Although used interchangeably, agnostic and atheist mean two very different things. To be Atheist is to claim that there is no God, as opposed to being without knowledge of God (agnostic).

How many times have we seen lists of questions that will allow you to diagnose your own alcoholism? Ten, twenty, fifty question each?

Starting at paragraph 1 on page 44 we find that there are two questions: "If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, (Question 1) or "if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, (Question 2) you are probably alcoholic." Reading through to the top of page 45 several powerful statements are made: "Our human resources, as marshalled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly." What does that mean? What does that tell us about willpower? About human resources (Fellowship) alone? About our ability to win in hand to hand combat with the alcoholic obsession? At the top of paragraph 1 - "Lack of power, that was our dilemma (Powerlessness). 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?"

Now we come to the purpose of the Big Book and the desired result of the AA program: "Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main object [and the object of the AA Program] is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself WHICH WILL SOLVE YOUR PROBLEM (emphasis added)." Let's turn back for a second to Roman numeral xiii - The Foreward to the first edition. The second sentence says the following: "TO SHOW OTHER ALCOHOLICS PRECISELY HOW WE HAVE RECOVERED IS THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK" (This sentence was capitalized in the first edition of the book). To recover from alcoholism we need to find a Power greater than ourselves which will solve our problem. This book has all of the directions necessary to bring about permanent recovery from alcoholism - our common problem. The answers are within the text and throughout the coming weeks we will continue to delve into the solution.

One of the things I was thinking about regarding this chapter is the name "We Agnostics", not "The Agnostics" - I mean it's almost if they assumed that everyone was an agnostic. Food for thought: why did they name this chapter the way they did?

Tomorrow we will continue on Page 46.

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Big Book Study - Post #14

Good morning all! And a BIG Thanks! to our friend Karen for posting the study while I was at The Wilson House...

\*\*\*Here's a good exercise for Chapter 4. Read through and count how many times the word "prejudice" in it's various forms appears. Also count synonyms such as "preconceived ideas" etc. You'll be surprised to see how often we are asked to lay aside prejudice against spiritual concepts in this chapter.\*\*\*

We are at page 46 - The first full paragraph here speaks of openmindedness: "Yes, we of agnostic temperament have had these thoughts and experiences. Let us make haste to reassure you. We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness

to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power, which is God."

Reading through to the top of page 47 we see the important idea expressed again - "When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So we used our own conception, however limited it was."

Skipping down to paragraph 2 we find another reference to the spiritual structure we are building: "It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built."

The cornerstone is belief, and on page 12 we found that "complete willingness" was our foundation. All that is important will rest on the foundation and the entire structure is squared up from this cornerstone. More elements of this spiritual structure will be revealed throughout the text.

In the following paragraph we see that belief comes before faith: "That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual principles unless we accepted many things on faith (indicating knowledge) which seemed difficult to believe." So we begin with a belief and it is through the knowledge that supports this belief that we begin to have faith.

More to come on tomorrow!

Jim

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Good Morning Everyone! Post 15

Appendix II - "The Spiritual Experience" is found on page 569.

"The terms "spiritual experience" and "spiritual awakening" are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms.

"Yet it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, must be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous."

This appendix was added after the first printing of the first edition of the book. There was significant confusion regarding the transformation that Bill experienced and the rest of the main text of the book. This appendix was added to clear some of the confusion. A lot of people were expecting the "white light experience" of the nature of what Bill had on December 11, 1934 at Towns Hospital. Here it goes on to explain that the "educational variety" was no less important or vital.

The real gems here are the reinforcement of "change" as the central theme of the experience. The following four terms mean essentially the same thing: -Spiritual Experience -Spiritual Awakening -Personality Change -Psychic Change

What we'll do here is identify how many times "change" or a synonym of "change" appears in the text, it may surprise you!

-Paragraph 1 - "personality change..."-Paragraph 2 - "personality changes..., spectacular upheavals."-Paragraph 3 - revolutionary changes..., immediate and overwhelming 'God-consciousness'..., a vast change in feeling and outlook."-Paragraph 4 - "transformations,... the difference...a profound alteration in his reaction to life."

So, let's see, that's eight "changes" on a single page. I guess they have made a point - we have to change the people we bring to AA. Not drinking and going to meetings is not enough. Through the 12 Steps we have the transformation, in the guise of a spiritual awakening or experience or psychic change, etc., that is "...THE result of these steps..." (from Step 12 - emphasis added).

Tomorrow we'll go further - Chapter 5 - How It Works (Not "how it happens" or "how we get it through osmosis"...).

Jim

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Big Book Study – Post #16

Good morning!

We can gain some insight into the writing of the book through an examination of the original text (pre-publication "Multilith") in conjunction with the text as printed in the first edition. Keep in mind, there were more or less two camps within AA at the time Bill wrote the book. The Akron/Cleveland camp was Bible based and religious in nature; the New York bunch was more psychological using a mental approach to gain the confidence of the newcomer and then hitting him with the spiritual angle. Sounds like a difficult task to write a book that would satisfy both trains of thought.

Most of the changes involved inserting "we" for "you" and making the text more inclusive and less like a sermon. Other changes involved key words that were inserted to change the basic meaning of the phrases.

Today and tomorrow, we will go through the first three pages of Chapter 5 to illustrate how the book was transformed by these changes. The words that were replaced will appear in brackets following the words or phrases by which they were replaced.

Page 58:

Paragraph 1 - "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path [directions]." "They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living [way of life] which demands rigorous honesty."

Paragraph 2 - "If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it - then you are ready to take certain steps [follow directions]."

Paragraph 3 - "At some of these we balked [you may balk]. We thought [You may think] we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not [We doubt you can]."

Paragraph 4 - "Remember we deal [you are dealing] with alcohol -cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us [you]. But there is One who has all power - that One is God. May you [You must] find Him now!"

We'll continue with paragraph 1 on page 59 and into the original written text of the 12 Steps tomorrow.

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Big Book Study - Post #17

Good Morning everyone!

Beginning on Page 59, paragraph 1, we'll continue to examine the text as originally written to see the changes made before the first edition of the book was published. The original, pre-publication version is known as the "Multilith".

"Half measures availed us (will avail you) nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked for (Throw yourself to) His protection and care with complete abandon. (Now we think you can take it)." "Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a (your) program of recovery:"

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.

[Unchanged - this step came from Dr. Silkworth.]

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. [From Dr. Carl Jung.]

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. [Essentially our "will" is our thoughts, our thinking. For example, when making out a will we are putting our thoughts down to be expressed after we pass on. Our "lives" are, basically, comprised of our actions. We are making a decision to turn our thoughts and our actions over to the care of God. This step came from the Oxford Group's "Surrender".]

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. [Steps 4 and 5 are unchanged and came from the Oxford Group's "Confess your sins".]
6. Were entirely ready to have (willing that) God remove these defects of character.
7. Humbly (, on our knees,) asked Him to remove our shortcomings (holding nothing back). [Steps 6 and 7 were inserted as a means of closing any loopholes.]
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make (complete) amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. [Unchanged - Steps 8 and 9 came from the Oxford Group's "Restitution".]
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. [Unchanged.]
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. [The words "conscious" and "as we understood Him" were omitted in the original draft.]
12. Having had a spiritual awakening (experience) as the result of these steps (this course of action), we tried to carry this message to (others, especially) alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

On Monday we'll continue with the first paragraph on page 60 and begin to delve into Step 3. Something to think about: the word "suggested" has been twisted around to make it sound like the steps are optional. Why do you think that word was inserted into the text?

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #18

Good Morning, everyone!

Paragraph 2 on page 60:

"Our description of the alcoholic, [found in the Doctor's Opinion and Chapter 3 - More About Alcoholism] the chapter to the agnostic, [Chapter 4 - We Agnostics] and our personal adventures before and after" [Chapter 1 - Bill's Story] make clear (are designed to sell you) three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives. [This is Step 1.]
- (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism. [This is the first half of Step 2.]
- (c) That God could and would (can and will) if He were sought. [Step 2, second half.]"

At this point we have completed Steps 1 and 2. Notice how we go directly into Step 3 here in paragraph 3: "Being convinced, we were at Step Three, which is that we decided [remember that our decisions must be followed up with action in order to make them meaningful -

Step 4 is the action] to turn our will [our thoughts] and our lives [our actions] over to God as we understood Him." Paragraph 4 - "The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success." In the preceding chapters we see that self-will has little effect regarding our drinking. Now we examine how that is true regarding our lives as a whole.

Read through to page 62 paragraph 1:

"Selfishness - Self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles." This is an important point. Our troubles weren't the product of a poor upbringing, horrible parents, being the member of \_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with any subset of society). We had a difficult time of it due to "Selfishness - Self-centeredness." "...we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt." We have discovered that WE are usually the reason for the suffering we have had to experience. We were not the unwitting "victims" of life that we frequently portrayed ourselves to be. I was astonished when this was pointed out to me.

Next paragraph - "So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. "...we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us!" So, it isn't always booze that kills us - selfishness will kill us indirectly. Throughout the book we will discover that bottles are only a symbol, that our problem runs deeper than the drinking itself.

Tomorrow we will pick up with the end of page 62 and touch upon that spiritual structure that we have been building.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #19

'Morning everyone :)

We are on page 62, Paragraph 3. Here we find out the position that God will occupy in our lives: "This is the how and the why of it.

First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director." Not the "bush league pinch hitter" we usually used Him as. Here's the reference to the spiritual structure: "Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom." Earlier we talked about "Willingness" as the Foundation, "Belief" as the Cornerstone and now the Keystone is allowing God to be our Director.

A stone mason will tell you that the entire structure of a stone arch rests upon that Keystone. This is an element that allows the structure to exist without which we would have a pile of stones. An arch is the strongest architectural and structural element known to man. This underscores the importance of where God fits into our lives.

Most of us our familiar with "The Promises" on page 84 and 85. What many of us don't realize is that there are promises throughout the book. Let's go to paragraph 1 on page 63. Read it through... sounds like promises to me - all these things will come to pass for us if we proceed to Step 3. "When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our own little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn." It's all great stuff!

Paragraph 3 is the Third Step Prayer: "God, I offer myself to Thee - to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!"

Reading through this prayer we can see things about Step 3 that may not have been apparent before. We begin to see that we have made a decision and have become open to having a Power greater than ourselves in our lives. We are asking to be relieved of the bondage of self, not the bondage of alcohol. This relates to what we believe to be the root of our problem: "Selfishness - Self Centeredness...", remember? At this stage, however, we have only made a decision. For that decision to become vital, we must take action.

I "made a decision" to fly to Las Vegas next week to go with the guys for the weekend. Until I purchase the tickets, make a rental car reservation, take time off from work, pack, drive to LaGuardia airport and board the plane, it is just a decision. The actions that follow this decision are what make the decision vital.

Tomorrow we will begin at the very bottom of page 63 and the beginning of a detailed discussion of Step 4 as it is detailed in the Big Book.

Have a great day!

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #20

Good morning, everyone!

We are at the bottom of page 63, last paragraph:

"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 [Step 3] was a vital and crucial step, it could have no permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things which had been blocking us. Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions."

So, we don't wait a year to move from Step 3 to Step 4. Remember, our decision is of little value unless it is accompanied by action, vigorous action.

What is the purpose of Step 4? In Step 4 we will be identifying and getting rid of those things that had been blocking us...from what? Blocking us from God's grace and our ability to live happy, joyous and free.

Here, again, is where many people get tripped up. Step 4 - Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. First, let's examine the word "fearless". Bill was, at heart, a businessman. He wrote from a businessman's perspective in this case. When conducting an inventory for a grocery store, for example, we look to be rid of damaged, rotten, and unsalable goods that prevent us from being profitable. From a businessman's perspective "fearless" means without regret, without emotion. When we discard a rotten head of cabbage we have no emotional attachment to it, we just get rid of it so that we can put a nice fresh head of cabbage in it's place. We need to treat the things that block us from God's grace in the same way as the rotten head of cabbage.

Next, let's look at the word "moral". Immediately the alcoholic thinks of the Sunday Preacher pointing out the moral decay and failings in his flock. In this context, however, we should equate "moral" with truth.

Let's look at paragraph 1 on page 64: "Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding [searching] and a fact-facing [fearless] process. It is an effort to discover the truth [moral] about the stock-in-trade." So we are identifying all that prevents us from being a successful enterprise, from having a shot at a happy and useful existence. "If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values."

In other words we have to become honest with ourselves about ourselves.

We begin by searching out the flaws in our makeup that caused our failure. "Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations." What did we learn earlier? "Selfishness - Self-centeredness. That we think, is the root of our troubles." There it is again--self, not alcohol per se, was the problem.

Tomorrow we'll discuss the roots of resentment and thoroughly define that which AA believes to be the number one offender.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #21

Good morning everyone!

We're at Paragraph 3 on page 64 - "Resentment is the number one offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else." Again we see it isn't necessarily booze that destroys us, but resentment.

Resentment was a word that I was unfamiliar with when I came to AA. It comes from the Greek "Re" = again and "Senteri" = to feel. It means to re-feel old feelings. An example is when we run into someone who said something nasty to us six months ago; we see the with the anger as if the statement was made to us this morning.

Alcoholics seem to store all this stuff within and it makes for a disconcerting individual. Step 4 is where we begin to deal with these resentments by putting them down on paper. This is the first of several lists we will make in connection with Step 4.

"In dealing with resentments, we set them down on paper. We listed people, institutions (perhaps the police or the DMV) or principles (10 Commandments, etc.) with whom we were angry." We begin our 4th Step by writing out a list of resentments. Our list will be comprised of 5 columns. On the left hand column we list all of those resentments first. We'll continue with the other four

columns later once we have written out our first-column list. We think back over our lives and think about how we would feel if we ran into Mr. Or Ms. _____. If our second grade teacher, Miss Crabtree, called us lazy or stupid in front of the class and we were ashamed of it and we begin to experience old anger when thinking of her we write her name down. If my lazy ass brother dropped by would I resent his presence? My boss, do I resent her? My ex-wife? My mother? The police? College professors? Drill Sargeant? The auto mechanic who ripped me off? My neighbor? The guy who made a pass at my wife? And what about God -- do I resent Him? Once we are done listing everyone we will begin filling out the next column: "The Cause." Next to each name we list what they did to cause me to become angry. We move from the top of the list to the bottom, and write out the cause for each resentment. (Page 65 is a great place for tips.) We'll go through the last three columns tomorrow.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #22

Good morning!

We are filling out the third column of the first of four parts of our 4th Step inventory. The four parts are:

1. Resentments
2. Fears
3. Sexual Conduct
4. Harms other than Sexual.

After filling out column 2, "The Cause" we move to column 3, "Affects My". Opposite each of the names we list our injuries - "Was it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal or sex relations which had been interfered with?" Referring to page 65 in the text we see "(fear)" throughout our "Affects My" column. The root of our anger was fear associated with each of these instincts.

In the next column, number 4, we list what we had done: "Putting out of mind the wrongs others have done I look for my own mistakes...What did I do, if anything, to set into motion trains of circumstances which in turn caused people or institutions to hurt me and eventually led to my resentment for them?"

Did I fail to pay the car loan and then resented the bank for repossessing the car? Was I lazy at work and failed to perform a day's work for a day's pay, was terminated and became resentful as a result? The example in the book doesn't have the last 2 columns in a table format.

Our last column, number 5, we look at ourselves:

"...we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish?, dishonest?, Self-seeking?, and frightened?"

Which of the above character defects caused me to do what I did, or cause me to want to hold on to an old resentment even though I may have done nothing to cause it? Was it Sloth?, Envy?, Greed?, Lust?...you know the list.

Page 66 - "It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness...this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again".

Strong words! Here is the first indication that we are restored to sanity, but if we are harboring resentment we can drink again.

Resentment seems to sabotage more long term sobriety than anything else.

This is the basic 4th Step process. We will repeat the same five columns - three more times:

1. A list of Fears
2. A list of our Sex Conduct
3. A list of Harms other than Sexual

The names appearing in our 4th Step lists will comprise the basis for our Step 8 list.

A prayer for Step 4 and resentment is found at the top of page 67:

"We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, 'This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done'." We pray for those we resent in order to be rid of the resentment.

Our sexual conduct is reviewed in the book on pages 68-70. There are 3 suggested prayers on the topic of sex: Page 69, paragraph 2: "We asked God to mold our ideals and help us to live up to them". In the next paragraph: "...we ask God what we should do about each specific matter."

The last prayer is on page 70, paragraph 2: "...We earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for strength to do the right thing."

Sex is very troublesome for alcoholics because sex is frequently used for purposes other than expressing love or for procreation. It can be used as a weapon or as a source of power or to feed ego. With it we harm others, can be quite selfish, and bring unhappiness to those about us. We have used it to purchase security, to exact retribution and to control others. Here we look at it and try to formulate, and live up to, an ideal with God's help.

Bill summarizes our process in the last two paragraphs of the chapter. Page 71:

"We hope you are convinced now that God can remove whatever self-will has blocked you off from Him. If you have already made a decision (Step 3), and an inventory (Step 4) of your grosser handicaps, you have made a good beginning. That being so you have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself".

On Monday we will go on to Chapter 6 "Into Action" and discuss Step 5.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #23

Good Morning, everyone!

We are at page 72 - Chapter 6 "Into Action" - and we're about to embark on our discussion of the 5th Step!

"Having made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it? We have been trying to get a new attitude, a new relationship with our Creator, and to discover the obstacles in our path." Let's pause here to ask ourselves what these obstacles are.

Looking at our 4th Step, last column, we discover that our defects are what stand between us and The Man Upstairs. "This requires action on our part, which, when completed, will mean that we have admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our DEFECTS." Didn't they mean "wrongs"? Reading through the book we see that Bill tries not to repeat himself - something he learned in school about writing. When he speaks of "defects of character," "shortcomings," and "wrongs," he means the same thing.

We are about to begin Step 5 and it is important to note the mindset of it. A former sponsor of mine would say to me how important it was to "Live my life as an open book." I had no idea what the man was talking about. Step 5 is the first time for most of us to allow anyone look into that "book." When we sit down with someone, usually a sponsor, and go over Step 5 we are exposing our private selves to someone else for the first time. The idea of Step 5 is to begin the process of living in an open manner. This is the beginning of the end of shame and guilt for these will shut us off from the sunlight of the Spirit.

In paragraph 2 on page 72 we acknowledge that "In actual practice, we usually find a solitary self-appraisal insufficient." The book is emphatic about including someone else, in addition to God, in the process. If we skip this vital step we may drink again. One of the things that trips people up is the last sentence in that same paragraph: "...until they told someone else ALL their life story. "Some of us have interpreted that as meaning that we have to write an autobiography. Let's look at what is in the book and what was meant.

First, on the preceding page, we have been told we are on Step 5 already - our 4th Step inventory is complete. Second, the idea is to reinforce the notion that it is a complete disclosure - that withholding anything will jeopardize our sobriety. What we expose by taking inventory in the manner as described in the previous chapter is what makes a difference. Those things that have

shut us off from the "sunlight of the Spirit" is what is important. Again, the basic point of "...ALL their life story" is that we should hold nothing back once we begin the 5th Step process. Reading through to the top of page 75 we discover one of the few places that the basic text is actually dated. Remember, at the time this book was originally written, that there were less than 100 alcoholics sober. It was quite possible not to find someone suitable for a Fifth Step. Happily, with over 2 million members, we are most likely to find someone within our fellowship to take this vital step with.

Tomorrow we will start at the first paragraph on page 75 and a thorough discussion of Step 5.

Have a great day!

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #24

Good morning everyone!

We are on Page 75. Paragraph 2 includes the 5th Step promises: "Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe."

There is some wonderful stuff there. This is where we really start to clear that channel between God and ourselves and begin to feel the power of His presence in our lives.

I had one of those old fashioned sponsors who made me read my entire fourth step to her. We looked at each item, analyzed it, and discussed the defect of character which was at the center of it. He also related some of her own fourth step stuff to me. Certainly I was not alone in living through my defects, since he showed me how he had done the same. At the end, he said that the old Jim K. had been exposed and the new Karen was about to come alive. This was the first time I had revealed myself entirely to someone else.

Today, because of a strong foundation, my life is an open book for anyone to see. Shame and guilt are no longer associated with the way that I live. It is no longer necessary to hide the things that I do or say because I try to live along spiritual lines. Step 5 was the integral step in beginning this road, "the Broad Highway, to freedom."

In order to prevent having to repeat the 4th and 5th Steps, my sponsor directed me to begin self examination each day using Step 10. Later in this study, we will see how Step 10 incorporates the same ideas and principles that have been expressed in Steps 4 and 5. By practicing Step 10 daily, I building up a load of trash, so I never have the need to take a second 4th Step. I take the trash out every day.

So, how long do we wait to proceed on to Step 6? Paragraph 3 on page 75 answers that question: "Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done."

Now we again examine that spiritual structure we have previously discussed on pages 12, 47, and 62: "Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall a free man at last."

The spiritual structure is an arch and each of the preceding steps have built upon each other to build this arch. If we have not been thorough, our structure will crumble. Reviewing our previous work is essential.

It will take us a while to get through this chapter. There is a lot of ground to cover-Steps 5 through 11 in one chapter!

Tomorrow we will proceed to page 76 and the discussion of Steps 6 and 7.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #25

Good Morning Everyone!

Page 76 - Let's look at the first paragraph - Believe it or not there is a prayer for the 6th Step too: "Can He now take them all - every one? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing."

We pray for willingness in Step 6. Much like the process in Step 3 we are really making a decision to become willing to have God remove these defects/shortcomings. And, much like Step 3 there is a definite action associated with the decision. We employ right action to fulfill our decision, we do the opposite of our defects, we act our way into good thinking.

Step 7 - "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen."

Our 7th Step Prayer. We have noticed that "defects" appear instead of "shortcomings" in the prayer. Bill, who preferred not to repeat himself, used a synonym: defects of character = shortcomings = wrongs.

There is more work to do to clear the channel between us and our Higher Power. "Faith without works is dead." How are we to do this work, also known as God's will, if we are still a prisoner to the past? How do we walk out from here and attempt to do His will if we aren't able to look everyone in the eye? Two tremendously vital steps that enable us to live happy, joyous and free are all about amends. Still on page 76, let's look at paragraph 3: "We have a list of persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends.

We made it when we took inventory" [during the step 4 and 5 process]. Here is where the term "amend" is defined: "Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past." ". . . repair the damage", not apologized - we are attempting to right a serious wrong. Remember, also, this step has its roots in the Oxford Group concept of "Restitution." Restitution is a synonym of amend. Through it we accept responsibility for our part and we make it right. "I'm really sorry" isn't what we are looking for here.

The prayer for Step 8 - "If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes." I needed to ask God for the will to face all these people and without His help it was too much for me. I brought my list to my sponsor to review and determine my best course of action to achieve these amends. Today I am grateful for having done so for

I received many helpful suggestions. He emphasized that I was there to clear my side of the street, that the wrongs of the other party were not the focus of the discussion.

Tomorrow we'll discuss Step 9 in depth, beginning at the bottom of page 76.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #26

Welcome everyone and good morning!

Let's start reading from the bottom of page 76. At the top of page 77, we find out what our purpose is: "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us." In order to be of service we must free ourselves of the past and whatever else stands between God and us. The process of steps 4 through 9 accomplishes this, if we are thorough. In paragraph 1 on page 77 we find out the painfully obvious: "It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend, but we find it more beneficial to us."

In the following paragraph, we get definite instruction on what we are to do in the process of making amends: "Under no condition do we criticize such a person or argue. Simply tell him that we will never get over drinking until we have done our utmost to straighten out the past." "Our utmost" means we do everything we possibly can. "We are there to sweep off our side of the street, realizing nothing worthwhile can be accomplished until we do so . . ." We are there to talk about our transgressions, regardless of how this person may have wronged us.

Paragraph 2 on page 78 gives us some direction regarding our creditors. "Most alcoholics owe money. We do not dodge our creditors." That means we answer the phone when they call. We respond to demands for payment and work out a payment plan. Of course, drunks want to save

up the cash and pay it all at once, but that never seems to work with us! Even if we commit to \$20 per week or some other means of payment, over time we meet our obligations. If we are avoiding phone calls or not opening the mail, we cannot do God's will, can we? Having paid my way out of the financial "black hole" myself I can tell you it is worth the effort.

From paragraph 3 on page 78 through page 82, there are several mentions of caution when making amends. Criminal offenses are covered on page 78 to 79. A prayer for the 9th Step appears on page 79 in the first paragraph: "...we ask [God] that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be."

The paragraph finishes with, "We must not shrink at anything." It's a funny thing—once we have faced all these people and institutions, we fear life less. We find out what we feared most was what resided within us, and through this process, we vanquish this fear.

Another caution—the involvement of others. In paragraph 2 on page 79, we read that we must be sure to account for the effect of our amends on others. A sponsor helps tremendously here, seeing the things we fail to see.

Turning to page 80 a definition of "amends" is buried in the text. Let's look at paragraph 3: "He felt he had done a wrong he could not possibly make right." Looking at that line, we realize that we are attempting to "right a serious wrong." Sounds quite a bit more than our "I'm sorry I \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)" doesn't it?

Tomorrow we will pick up at the bottom of page 80 where the discussion of our domestic situation begins in relation to Step 9.

Have a great day, everyone.

Love,

Karen

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Big Book Study - Post #27

Good Morning!

We are at the bottom of page 80. The next several paragraphs, through the end of paragraph 1 on page 82, deal with the problems associated with sex outside of marriage. This is an especially difficult area for alcoholics. If we have been unfaithful we have to face up to it, if we continue to be dishonest with ourselves and those about us, we are setting ourselves up for failure.

The last paragraph on this page, and the first on the following page, underscore the fact that we have to do more than stay sober in order to make effective amends: "We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough. He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, "Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?"

"Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We must take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won't fill the bill at all."

Reading through to the last paragraph on page 83, we see that we are going to have to take definitive action when taking Step 9, particularly with our families.

Now the promises that everyone likes to talk about: "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."

It is important to note where these particular promises are in the book - at the end of Step 9. At this time we have completed our initial "house cleaning". Once complete, we shall receive God's grace. The promises begin to come true for us. "If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through." "This phase" is the amends phase. The "Promises" are wonderful and they give us a lot of hope, with one caveat: page 84 paragraph 1 - "They will always materialize if we work for them." We don't get them by osmosis. They just don't fall into our lap, we have to work for them.

The whole process of Steps 8 and 9 is geared to prepare us to be of service to God and our fellows. When we complete this phase of our development we can look the whole world in the eye. This is when we can truly live one day at a time.

Monday, we'll start at paragraph 2 on page 84 and our discussion of Step 10 in the book. Stay tuned, we have more promises to come.

Have a great weekend, everyone!

Love,

Karen

What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, The Master calls the butterfly.

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### Big Book Study - Post #28

Good morning to everyone! And a big thanks for Honey's help!

Although it seems like we're running through the Steps, keep in mind that in this chapter alone we cover steps 5 through 10 -- a mere 16 pages for 6 steps. No wonder this chapter is called Into Action!

We are at page 84, paragraph 2, and the beginning of Step 10.

"This thought brings us to Step Ten, which suggests we continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along." So, in Step 10, we continue the process of housecleaning/amends that we have embarked on in the Step 4 through 9 process. "We have entered the world of the Spirit." We have had a spiritual awakening or experience. "Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness."

This is the first of the continuing growth steps. In the past Steps 10, 11, and 12 were called Maintenance Steps. Although maintenance is part of the idea we really need continued growth through Steps 10 - 12. "It should continue for our lifetime." A daily 10th Step, an integral part of our lives - that's the idea. "Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear."

Sounds like a 4th Step doesn't it? "When these crop up we ask God at once to remove them." Sounds like what we have done in Steps 6 and 7. "We discuss them with someone immediately (Step 5, right?) and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone." That sounds like our actions in Steps 8 and 9 to me. What is our code? "Love and tolerance is our code."

In this short paragraph outlining the 10th Step we have touched upon Steps 4 through 9. We are continuing the process on a daily basis that we began when we did Steps 4 through 9. If we are thorough in our 10th Step there is likely to be no need to repeat any of Steps 4 through 9.

Another group of promises, the Step Ten Promises, appears at the bottom of Page 84 - last paragraph: "And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone- even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned." Can we hide behind "insanity" any longer? Still "sick"? Are we "crazy"? No, not in respect to alcohol. We have been restored to sanity and are no longer the victim of the mental obsession that dooms us to drink. That is a miracle to me! "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 are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. ... Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. ... This is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition." It sounds to me that we shouldn't be fighting booze if we have gone through this process. Are we white knuckling it? Then, perhaps, we haven't practiced the program as presented in this book. Are we thinking about a drink frequently? Are we tempted to drink? We must go back and review what we have done; there is a flaw somewhere. Have we

been entirely honest? "Have we tried to make mortar without sand? ... Have we held on to some of the worst items in stock?"

Some of the greatest miracles of sobriety are made possible through the practice and application of the 12 Step process in our lives. It is these miracles that separates Alcoholics Anonymous from everything else out there. These miracles are possible for each and every one of us. But these same miracles are only possible by following the program as presented in the Big Book. Once we decide to "work our own program" we cannot expect the benefits of this message. Tomorrow we'll continue our discussion on Step 10 on page 85, paragraph 1.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #29

Good Mornin' all!

Page 85, Paragraph 1 - While we have recovered from alcoholism: "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 our activities. 'How can I best serve Thee--Thy will (not mine) be done.' These are thoughts which must go with us constantly. We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will."

Although we have made a decision to turn our will over to the care of God as we understand Him (in Step 3) we are told here how to use our will to fulfill that same decision. Our will isn't taken from us; instead, we are taught the proper use of our will. The proper use of our will is to try to align our self-will with God's will.

Step 10 is our principal means of growth after we have completed the process of the first 9 steps. It is not a step that can be incorporated into our lives by itself, however. To be vital it must be paired up with Step 11. In the "12 Steps and 12 Traditions", in the discussion of Step 11, Bill refers to the "unshakeable foundation for life." That foundation is the logical interweaving of the process of self-examination (Step 10) and conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves (Step 11). If the channel between us and God is filled with unattended 10th Step stuff -- fear, resentment, anger, guilt and the like -- we will not have the open channel we need to God and His Grace. The sunlight of the Spirit can't come into our lives. Conversely, when our conscious contact with God isn't there our ability to "identify the worst items in stock" can disappear as well. Step 11 begins at the bottom of Page 85. Let's read through to page 86 - paragraph 1:

"When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid? (Step 4? Sounds like it.) Do we owe an apology? (similar to Step 9 perhaps?) Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? (Step 5) Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? (More inventory) ... After making our review we ask God's forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken." So, at the end of the day we review and, through meditation and prayer, we "inquire what corrective measures should be taken." Sounds like Steps 10 and 11 go hand-in-hand. We are asking God for direction in prayer. Some of the folks I got sober with used to say that prayer was talking to God and meditation was listening. As we go through Step 11 here in the book we will see that Bill's knowledge of meditation and prayer was somewhat limited and he was forced to keep it simple. (This is what he is referring to when he says "we only know a little" on Page 164, by the way). Because prayer and meditation takes innumerable forms it was probably for the best.

Tomorrow we will continue with our discussion of Step 11 on page 86 at paragraph 2.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #30

Good Morning and Happy St. Patrick's Day!

We're at Page 86, paragraph 2: "On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. ... we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest

or self-seeking motives." (This is one of the Step 11 prayers). If we are indecisive: "Here we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. (another prayer.) We relax and take it easy."

We aren't obsessing on this, we think of something else knowing that the answers will come. Although we come to rely upon intuition we always check with others on those thoughts before putting them into action.

Yet another prayer: the Big Book 11th Step Prayer, page 87, paragraph 1: "We usually conclude the period of meditation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems. We ask especially for freedom from self-will, and are careful to make no requests for ourselves only." Here we are praying for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.

What is the outcome? At the top of page 88: "We are in much less danger of (suffering from) excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions." Those foolish decisions caused me plenty of trouble!

Now, you'll notice that Bill was getting at what meditation meant for him: From the point of "On awakening..." to immediately before "We usually conclude the period of meditation..." we are engaging in meditation. We are thinking about what our actions will be, what we will face, how we will conduct ourselves. I began my meditation life by quieting the endless conversation that I used to have with myself inside of my head, quite simply I was driving myself nuts! Then I started to direct my thinking to what I would face over the course of the day. Of course that meant that I had to change the way that I lived. I couldn't continue to live my life as if I was shot out of a cannon each morning. I received valuable suggestions: instead of waking up at the last possible second, perhaps if I got up a little earlier that may allow time for meditation, instead of waiting until the fuel gauge read "E" maybe I should fill up at 1/4 of a tank. Leaving a little earlier for work would help my state of mind in the morning, arriving less frazzled and on time. These and many other suggestions helped immensely. The result was it was easier to meditate in the morning and prepare for the day.

Today I get up early -- around 5:15 am. I shower, get dressed and meditate on what the day will bring with Trixie the cat. I leave our apartment at 6:15, catch the 6:32 to Grand Central - meditating a bit more on the train. I arrive at my office at 7:10, make coffee and tend to the Big Book Study connecting with God through service.

By the time I begin my day at the office I have no fear because I always have a Partner who has all power. I put in the footwork and the results are up to Him. My life is no longer the "Chinese Fire Drill" that it once was. The 12 Steps have been the key.

Exercise: Go back and re-read the text and count how many times "think," "thought," "brains," "intuition," or their synonyms appear in the text. You may be surprised to learn how much "thought" goes into meditation!

Tomorrow we'll begin Chapter 7. Since faith without works is dead, there is more action to come.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #31

Good morning everyone, and Happy Thursday!

Chapter 7 starts on page 89. It is dedicated in its entirety to Step 12. "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs." The bulk of this chapter is dedicated to carrying the message. Specifically from the beginning on page 89 to page 100. Why is this?

Let's put the text into historical perspective - During the period of time when the book was written there were about 60 to 100 members sober - this after 4 years of work. There were two basic centers of activity: New York which was intellectual/psychological, and Akron/Cleveland which were more evangelical in nature. When originally written the 12th Step said this: "Having had a spiritual experience as the result of this course of action, we tried to carry this message to

others - especially alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs." Clearly the mindset is one of conversion, spreading the word. Chapter 7 was written with the idea that it was (a) good to increase our numbers and that (b) carrying the message is the way to do it. They also believed that the message wasn't one that required a "personality" to convey it. Certainly Bill and Bob weren't about to go on tour. This book was the perfect vehicle to carry the message. By 1940, even Bill was surprised at the success of the book in carrying the message. When we read through these pages we see things that astonish us: We aren't convincing anyone that they need this program - we are demonstrating what it has done for us. We are attracting, not promoting. The assumption is that the alcoholic is ready to listen to the message. Page 94 - paragraph 1: "Make it plain he is not under pressure, that he needn't see you again if he doesn't want to." There is an old saying that isn't repeated often today - "AA is a program for those who want it, not necessarily for those who need it."

We will also be astonished at the length to which we are expected to go in helping others.

Paragraph 1 on page 97 really details what is expected of us.

"Never avoid these responsibilities, but be sure you are doing the right thing if you assume them. Helping others is the foundation stone of your recovery. A kindly act once in a while isn't enough.

You have to act the Good Samaritan every day, if need be. It may mean the loss of many nights' sleep, great interference with your pleasures, interruptions to your business. It may mean sharing your money and your home, counseling frantic wives and relatives, innumerable trips to police courts, sanitariums, hospitals, jails and asylums. Your telephone may jangle at any time of the day or night. Your wife may sometimes say she is neglected. A drunk may smash the furniture in your home, or burn a mattress. You may have to fight with him if he is violent. Sometimes you will have to call a doctor and administer sedatives under his direction. Another time you may have to send for the police or an ambulance. Occasionally you will have to meet such conditions." That's pretty involved! The rehab community has taken much of this responsibility from us. Whether that is to the detriment of AA is for a separate discussion.

Tomorrow we will continue with Page 100 - last paragraph. We'll discuss what our spiritual awakening has done for us and what being a "Recovered Alcoholic" means in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Thanks, everyone, for the opportunity to be of service.

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Big Book Study - Post #32

Good morning everyone!

Let's go to page 100, last paragraph-

"Assuming we are spiritually fit, we can do all sorts of things alcoholics are not supposed to do. People have said that we must not go where liquor is served; we must not have it in our homes; we must shun friends who drink; we must avoid moving pictures which show drinking scenes; we must not go into bars; our friends must hide their bottles if we go to their house; we mustn't think or be reminded about alcohol at all. Our experience shows this isn't necessarily so."

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

These are some very important lines in the Big Book. Having an alcoholic mind means we haven't had a spiritual awakening, we haven't changed sufficiently to have recovered from this disease. If, when confronted with circumstances where we obsess on the alcohol in a given setting, we should be taking our own inventories to reveal why this is so. Let's go back for a moment to page 84, at the bottom. The third sentence in the paragraph at the bottom says: "We will seldom be interested in liquor." Reviewing this second set of promises we see that we have an entirely new state of mind when it comes to alcohol.

Returning to page 101 it is easy to see why we are on dangerous ground when we continue to obsess about alcohol when in such situations. Remember, we cannot defeat this obsession on our

own, it can only be vanquished through a spiritual awakening that is THE RESULT of the 12 Steps.

So, to summarize: if we have had a spiritual awakening and are in fit spiritual condition we are able to go anywhere if our motives are thoroughly good. Does that mean I can go to a strip club and drink cokes all night while I indulge in a favorite defect of character? Probably not, my motives are spiritually flawed. Can I go to a family gathering where there will be people who can drink with impunity? Most definitely, assuming I am in fit spiritual condition.

Let's turn to page 102 paragraph 2 - "Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful. You should not hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth on such an errand. Keep on the firing line of life with these motives and God will keep you unharmed."

What does this mean? Sometimes we may find ourselves in situations condition our ability to be of maximum helpfulness to others is compromised. In fact our ability to seek and do God's will is hampered. You will also notice that this is the second place in the Big Book where "the firing line" is mentioned. Go back to The Doctor's Opinion, you'll see it there also (third paragraph on page xxviii). "The firing line" is another way of saying we must remain familiar with our alcoholism - "keep the memory green" so to speak. If we aren't carrying this message we may forget where we came from. We may even begin to think that we were just connoisseurs of fine wines and beers. If we stay on the firing line of life we will never forget the type of drinkers we were.

"AFTER ALL, OUR PROBLEMS WERE OF OUR OWN MAKING. BOTTLES WERE ONLY A SYMBOL. BESIDES, WE HAVE STOPPED FIGHTING ANYBODY OR ANYTHING. WE HAVE TO!"

Alcoholism comes in people, not bottles and we have created most, if not all, of our own problems. This is the second place where we have stopped fighting - again, review pages 84 and 85.

On Monday we will go on to Chapter 8 - To Wives.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #33

Good morning everyone!

"Chapter 8 - To Wives" begins on page 104. My comments are somewhat limited on this chapter, both here and at the face to face weekend Big Book Studies that Dave and I run. There is some historical stuff that is very interesting however. First, a trivia question: Who wrote this chapter? Most of us would immediately say Lois Wilson or Dr. Bob's wife Anne Smith, but, alas, we would be wrong.

Originally Bill wanted Anne Smith to write it. She had no interest in doing so. (I can see, in my mind's eye, Lois jumping up and down saying "I'll do it! I'll do it!" and Bill saying "I don't think so!") Bill decided that he would write it himself. No control issues there! Of course Alanon was formed in the early 1950's and became a society standing separate from AA. (As a historical aside it is interesting to note that spouses were very much involved with the alcoholic in the context of meetings at the very early beginnings of AA. This made this chapter even more appropo when it is viewed from this historical perspective).

From the bottom of page 108 through the middle of page 110 Bill describes the "four husbands" illustrating the progression of the disease. The following paragraph is perhaps the most important in the chapter: "We never, never try to arrange a man's life so as to shield him from temptation. The slightest disposition on your part to guide his appointments or his affairs so he will not be tempted will be noticed. Make him feel absolutely free to come and go as he likes. This is important. If he gets drunk, don't blame yourself.

God has either removed your husband's liquor problem or He has not. If not, it had better be found out right away. Then you and your husband can get right down to fundamentals. If a repetition is to be prevented, place the problem, along with everything else, in God's hands."

This is from page 120, last paragraph. It mirrors paragraphs 1 and 2 on page 101. Remember what we have discussed throughout this study - Bill will repeat important ideas in order to reinforce them to the reader. This is yet another example of this style of writing.

Tomorrow we will continue with Chapter 9 - The Family Afterward.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #34

Good Morning all!

Today we will begin on page 122 - "The Family Afterward." The dynamics of a family that has endured alcoholism are skewed to the point where living together has become difficult, sometimes almost impossible.

Written many years before Alanon and Alateen were formed, this and the preceding chapter attempt to steer us all--alcoholic or not--down the spiritual path.

Paragraph 3 on page 122 is a theme that is oft repeated throughout the book: "Cessation of drinking is but the first step away from a highly strained, abnormal condition." AA isn't a "not drinking club." Reading to page 127 the advice is offered to all--alcoholic or not--that patient striving is required to become free of the past and to grow into something better. Although we want results now, we must realize that it will take time to recover on all different levels.

On page 127, the first paragraph reminds us to be cautious about focusing on a single aspect of our recovery. "The head of the house ought to remember that he is mainly to blame for what befell his home. He can scarcely square the account in his lifetime. But he must see the danger of over-concentration on financial success. Although financial recovery is on the way for many of us, we found we could not place money first. For us, material well-being always followed spiritual progress; it never preceded." If we concentrate on our spiritual condition we will mend financially.

The following paragraph directs us to make our efforts under our own roofs. "Since the home has suffered more than anything else, it is well that a man exert himself there. He is not likely to get far in any direction if he fails to show unselfishness and love under his own roof.

We know there are difficult wives and families, but the man who is getting over alcoholism must remember he did much to make them so."

The underlying message here is about balance. An overemphasis on any single area creates unbalance. Those areas that are neglected suffer.

Balance is something to be sought after. Over-concentration on finances, spirituality, meeting attendance, relationships, etc., at the expense of those other things that comprise this life will lead us to more difficulty.

Tomorrow we will start on page 128. The discussion will start with how the family reacts to a "stirring spiritual experience."

Thanks for participating!

Karen

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Big Book Study - Post #35

Good Morning everyone!

We're at page 128 of Chapter 9 - "The Family Afterward." The reading from here through the bottom of page 130 centers on, for lack of a better term, spiritual infancy. It's that period of time that many of us experience where we believe that we have found an oasis in the desert of an alcoholic life. It's roots may be in the spiritual experience, or simple and overwhelming gratitude. What this reading reveals is that, no matter what the circumstance, imbalance in life is not sustainable. Although the pendulum has swung from active alcoholism to over-zealousness in the spiritual realm what will happen, given time, is that we will become centered. Here our families are asked to allow us that period of time to become centered, to put our AA service work and

spiritual lives into proper perspective with all of the other segments of our lives: work, family, home, service, etc. Step 10 is the primary tool to accomplish this desired result.

Beginning at the bottom of page 130 and reading through to the top of page 133 the text discusses family life, taking inventory within our families and developing a new attitude toward the alcoholic member. This is rooted in our new attitude as recovered alcoholics.

Paragraph 2 on page 132: "Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have been given the power to help others." Continuing on to the following paragraph - "So let each family play together or separately, as much as their circumstances warrant. We are sure God wants us to be Happy, Joyous, and Free." Sounds like we get a glimpse of what God's will is for us. If we are careful when reading the Big Book we will find that much of God's will is revealed to us. It may be general in nature but it is there. If we're not "Happy, Joyous, and Free" we may be missing something in our spiritual lives.

The remainder of this chapter deals with the relationship of the alcoholic to his family, his health and sex relations. It tells us not to be shy about consulting physicians for they are here to help.

On page 135 there is a telling sentence - paragraph 1: "Seeing is believing to most families who have lived with a drinker." Our actions are far more revealing than our words, especially at home.

And, of course, the first three slogans:

First Things First

Live and Let Live

Easy Does It

Have a great day everyone!

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #36

Good Mornin' all!

Chapter 10 - To Employers begins on page 136. This chapter was written by Hank Parkhurst. Hank was one of the early New York members and a business partner of Bill's - they were in the business of forming a service station buying cooperative and selling auto parts through the Honest Dealers Association. Hank was also an officer in "Works Publishing," the entity formed to publish the Big Book. In April of 1940 Hank got drunk which was to be a source of great difficulty since he controlled a significant amount of stock in Works Publishing.

The reading from pages 136 to 140 centers on the loss of capable employees. The point is also made that it can be difficult to make employers understand the nature of the malady. Page 138 at the end of paragraph 2: "The only answer I could make was that if the man followed the usual pattern, he would go on a bigger bust than ever. I felt this was inevitable and wondered if the bank was doing the man an injustice. Why not bring him into contact with some of our alcoholic crowd? He might have a chance. I pointed out that I had had nothing to drink whatever for three years, and this in the face of difficulties that would have made nine out of ten men drink their heads off. Why not at least afford him an opportunity to hear my story? 'Oh no,' said my friend, 'this chap is either through with liquor, or he is minus a job. If he has your willpower and guts, he will make the grade.'" At the top of page 139 that individual got drunk again.

At the end of page 139 the employers are instructed to look within their own organizations and to try to identify those employees who are alcoholic. The point is made that there are many talented and worthwhile employees who can be helped and can return to usefulness if they are given a chance to recover. A generalized approach with an employee is discussed through page 145.

We'll return to this chapter tomorrow, with the last paragraph on page 145.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #37

Good Mornin' all-

We are beginning at the bottom of page 145. Reading through to page 148, there are many ideas that have been adopted by industry in general that are beneficial to helping alcoholics in the workplace.

Paragraph 2 on page 148: "It boils down to this: No man should be fired just because he is an alcoholic. If he wants to stop he should be afforded a real chance."

In evidence today are the multitude of EAP programs that direct alcoholics to recovery.

Read to the bottom of page 149 - last paragraph:

"Today I own a little company (The Honest Dealers Association). There are two employees (Jim B and Bill) who produce as much as five normal salesmen. But why not? They have a new attitude, and they have been saved from a living death. I have enjoyed every moment spent in getting them straightened out."

That was the little automobile parts business that Hank ran and that Bill and Jimmy B. worked at. I don't suppose there was any exaggeration there?

<wink>

The last chapter before going on to Dr. Bob's story and returning to the beginning of the book is Chapter 11 - "A Vision For You" on page 151. We'll begin there on Monday.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #38

Good Morning!

Chapter 11 - "A Vision for You" begins on page 151.

If you have been following along with the study from the beginning you are aware of the writing style of Bill Wilson. Much like him, however, I'll recount it for those of us who have recently joined us.

There are several aspects of Bill's writing style which are pretty consistent throughout the book. First, Bill will make the same point in several different ways. Second, he tries not to repeat the same words over and over. Third, he sums up at the end of each chapter. It is the third point that is pertinent for our discussion of Chapter 11. This is the final chapter in the main text of the book. We will see how he will "sum up" or recap what has been covered earlier.

The first three pages cover the introduction and the earlier parts of the book and discloses to the reader what he may find. At the bottom of page 153 and through page 164 Bill recounts the beginnings of AA and a very general outline of AA's brief history is given.

Bill doesn't identify the places or people who were instrumental in the beginning although all of the essentials are there: Towns Hospital, Dr. Silkworth, The Mayflower Hotel, Akron Ohio, Dr. Bob, Bill Dotson (AA #3), Cleveland, New York, etc.

Tomorrow we will look at some of the high points of the history and look closely at page 164.

Then we'll finish up with Dr. Bob's Nightmare on Wednesday.

\*\*\*The Study will begin again on Thursday, April 1st.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #39

Good morning all!

There are a great many places that have marked AA's early history.

The Mayflower Hotel in Ohio is one. Towns Hospital at 293 Central Park West at 89th Street in Manhattan is another. (Coincidentally I once lived half a block down 89th Street from there).

Stepping Stones was the home in Bedford Hills, NY in Westchester County, just north of New York City, where Bill and Lois lived. They moved there in 1941. I was fortunate enough to meet Lois there in 1980. She passed on in 1988. Stepping Stones has a website at www.Steppingstones.org or make an appointment to see it with my friend Eileen G., the director of the place. Another place is Bill's birthplace in East Dorset, VT. The house is fully restored and a former pigeon of mine, Dean M., can give you a detailed history of the place. Dean has been

doing service as the assistant manager of the place for many years. Rooms are available to stay in for a reasonable cost. Dinners are served family style and the food is great.

Bill and Lois are buried nearby. One of the most moving experiences is to go to Bill and Lois' grave and read the touching notes and see the pictures of children left there by those expressing undying gratitude to Bill's work.

Page 164 - Paragraph 2 is a place where people will lift something out of context in an attempt to prove a spurious point. "Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little." Some people seize upon this to mean that the instructions outlined in the book are optional. (I wrote an article on this topic which was published in the April 2002 edition of The Grapevine entitled "Spiritual Kindergarten" by Jim K. of Manhattan - a copy of it is located in the "Files" section at the study home page). What the first 100 knew only a little about was the spiritual experience. They had the answer to recovering from alcoholism. Keep in mind that Bill was sober only four years at the time the book was written. The word "suggestive," in this context, means "a starting point," or "a beginning." It means "an introduction to spiritual principles." AA is but a means to the end of living a spiritual life. Our lives aren't meant to be lived in AA but outside of it.

"The answers will come if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit what you haven't got." The "2 step" trap -- to carry the message effectively you need to have a message to transmit.

"Abandon yourself to God as you understand God (Steps 1, 2 and 3). Admit your faults to Him and your fellows (Steps 4, 5, 6, and 7). Clear away the wreckage of the past (Steps 8 and 9). Give freely of what you find and join us (Steps 10, 11, and 12). We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, (The Fellowship of God) and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you until then." In his classic style, Bill sums up at the end.

Tomorrow, we will wrap up our study cycle with Dr. Bob's Story.

Tomorrow afternoon we will post the Study outline/instructions.

****Then on Thursday, April 1st, we will begin a new study cycle.

Jim

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Big Book Study - Post #40

Good Morning, everyone!

Dr. Bob's Nightmare is the first of the personal stories on page 171.

Page 165 is interesting however. This is the Section Heading "Personal Stories - How Forty-Three Alcoholics RECOVERED From Their Malady" (Emphasis is mine). Not a typo.

Page 172 - Paragraph 1 - Bob attributes "selfishness" as playing an important part in "bringing on my alcoholism". In the next paragraph we can see his antipathy towards the church. Reading through page 173, we see that he is in trouble early on with drinking. Change of scenery didn't help. At the bottom of page 174, he began to go to sanitariums voluntarily to dry out. This was before Prohibition (1920), and he still had many more years of drinking ahead of him.

On pages 176 and 177, his drinking was out of control and all of the classic symptoms were there: hiding bottles, others recognizing his drinking as a problem, hoarding alcohol, social life deteriorating, switching drinks (the Beer Experiment), etc. On page 178, he falls in with "...a crowd of people who attracted me because of their seeming poise, health and happiness." (About 1933.) That crowd was The Oxford Group, although Dr. Bob had not connected this group of people with any solution of his drinking problem. He drank and spent time with the Oxford Groups for the next two and a half years.

In paragraph 1, the lady who called Bob was Henrietta Sieberling (of the rubber tire manufacturing empire) and the friend was Bill Wilson. The first meeting between Bill and Bob was about 6 hours longer than the fifteen minutes Bob was initially willing to give to Bill. Bob did get drunk again 3 weeks later at the AMA convention. Bill worked with him again and the founding of our society dates from June 10, 1935\* the date of Dr. Bob's last drink.

The end of paragraph two says a lot of the power of one alcoholic talking with another - "Of far more importance was the fact that he was the first living human with whom I had ever talked, who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience. In other words, he talked my language. He knew all the answers, and certainly not because he had picked them up in his reading." The barrier had been breached!

"Passing it on" was important to Bob - the last paragraph on page 180 and continuing on to the top of the following page. "I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons:

1. Sense of duty.
2. It is a pleasure.
3. Because in so doing I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me.
4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip."

The ending of his story boils down to the essence of how important an open mind is in order to accept what we have to offer. The assumption is that the motivation to seek sobriety is in place, that we are ready to listen to conviction as only the dying can be: "If you think you are an atheist, an agnostic, a skeptic, or have any other form of intellectual pride which keeps you from accepting what is in this book, I feel sorry for you. If you still think you are strong enough to beat the game alone, that is your affair. But if you really and truly want to quit drinking liquor for good and all, and sincerely feel that you must have some help, we know that we have an answer for you. It never fails if you go about it with one half the zeal you have been in the habit of showing when getting another drink.

"Your Heavenly Father will never let you down!"

- - Which may not truly be the date since the AMA Convention began on June 10th. Recent research suggests that June 17th may actually be the true date. Not that it really matters much...
- This afternoon we'll begin again with the guidelines and follow with the first post of the new cycle tomorrow. Thanks to everyone who has participated in this cycle. And I just want to take the opportunity here to thank Honey so much for her help and devoted service.
- Pass on the link: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bigbookmeeting> to your other friends so they may share in what you have found.
- Jim

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