

Open Letter To:
AA GSO Leadership and AA Board of Trustees
How Does the Program Really Work?

My previous letters topic was When Did Meetings Become the Program? This letter addresses my understanding and experience of how the program of recovery works.

Based on my 31 years of experience, there are many wonderful and helpful components to support the initial approach to recovery in AA:

- Attending and participating in a variety of Twelve Step meetings;
- Taking and performing commitments at those meetings;
- Having and regularly attending a home group;
- Getting and fostering an effective relationship with an experienced sponsor;
- Obtaining and reading the literature, especially the books Alcoholics Anonymous and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions;
- Knowing and understanding the Twelve Steps.

But these, singularly or cumulatively, are NOT the program of recovery outlined in the Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous! The program of recovery is the actual application of the suggested Twelve Steps to our personal life.

Thinking that one can achieve the Step Twelve promise of a Spiritual Awakening by reading the Twelve Step literature, sitting in meetings, and discussing it with our sponsor, is like sitting in our garage, reading the auto manual with our mechanic, and expecting the car to be fixed.

Change is not going to happen until there is the application of the information in the manual!

My understanding of the AA program of recovery is a series of suggested personal actions described precisely in the Big Book:

1. We establish a personal relationship with:
Power: Steps 1-3 = our experience of no choice & a decision about and for Power
Self: Steps 4-7 = our identification & removal of the obstacles in us to Power
Others: Steps 8-9 = our willingness to change & to repair the damage we caused others.

It is a process based on a sequence of rigorous actions

Prayer

Reading

Reflection

Writing

Discussion

leading to the experience of the promised Spiritual Awakening. We are changed!

2. We continue to foster these relationships through a consistent daily practice of:

Step 10: Inventory = Examining our disturbances and resulting behavior on the spot

Step 11: Prayer & Meditation = Improving consciousness twice a day = a.m. and p.m.

Step 12: Principles and Service = Enlarging compassion as an organic 24/7 attitude

In Step Ten the Big Book confirms that We have entered the world of the Spirit. This is Our Way of Life, which we commence at the same time we start making our Step Nine amends: a commitment to continue the personal changes of ones self and the repair of historical damage to others.

Although the program of recovery is not meetings or sponsorship, it is greatly facilitated and supported by both. However, going to meetings and talking to a sponsor will not produce or sustain the necessary personal Spiritual Awakening. This experience is the single promise of reaching Step Twelve. The program of recovery is a process of establishing and then maintaining an effective personal relationship with Power, our self, and with others.

The litmus test and sure evidence of an individual having experienced this Spiritual Awakening is a personality transformation - a measurable, visible change in thinking, feeling, and especially behavior. This conversion experience is positively disproportionate to the amount of work done by that individual - bigger than that persons contribution warrants by itself. It is done TO us not BY us.

Step Twelve suggests we carry this message . Chapter 7 contains the practical suggestions for Working with Others. It promises that this work will provide immunity from the spiritual malady. The consistent message throughout the text book is the need for and benefits of helping others. How then do we explain the lack of growth in AA membership and the deplorable rate of individual relapse?

Contrast AAs slow growth in the last 40 years with the experience of modern multi-level marketing schemes. Those with financial incentives and a properly structured organization have outcomes showing exponential contact growth. At the same time, the recent development of social media and its successful use in advertising, also demonstrates geometric contact outreach.

What is AAs growth problem? Has there developed a dis-connect from the original message and the tools that fostered it? AA was originally designed to produce freedom from alcohol through a spiritual incentive and to replicate that freedom for others through a personal outreach structure.

Could it be the classic human problem: loss of focus and the complacency of an easier, softer way? Has there been a gradual growth of an AA culture that perpetuates the misunderstanding of what is the program of recovery? Does most of the AA membership believe that meetings are the program? How relevant to the majority of AAs membership is the application of ALL the Steps as contained in the book Alcoholics Anonymous? Has the spirit of fellowship replaced the Fellowship of the Spirit?

These challenging questions raise even more questions. Has this unhealthy change in focus permeated the AA culture for so long that even the AA GSO Leadership and AA Board of Trustees, coming out of that culture, are shaped by it without being conscious of it? Perhaps their vision has been blurred by cultural cataracts.

Is it time for a thorough and rigorous inventory of the current understanding and integrity of AAs 1st Legacy? Taking this inventory may allow AA to step out of the current culture to examine and evaluate the structure and outcome of events like the recent International Conference in Atlanta. This inventory may allow AA to pause and examine our current alignment with the original AA intent and mission. This process may help AA GSO Leadership and the AA Board of Trustees develop themes and topics for future International Conferences which will foster a re-vitalization throughout the worldwide AA Fellowship with respect to AAs 1st Legacy.

The actual intended program of recovery is a personal transformation through following the precise suggestions for each of the 12 Steps as described in the book Alcoholics Anonymous. The writers tell us, if we want what they have, we DO what they DID!

What did they do? Perhaps we need to revisit the ingredients and actions of the original founders and inventory our current ingredients and actions. Has there been a loss of focus through culture creep and distortion?

We cant give away what we dont have. But we will give away what we do have. If a person has an untreated spiritual malady, that is what they will transmit. If a sponsor doesnt understand the program of recovery and has not experienced a personal spiritual awakening, then that sponsor will perpetuate and aggravate this culture of ignorance and slogans. They dont know what they dont know; they cant see what they cant see! They are passing on what was passed on to them. Activity is believed to be effective and meaningful action. In reality.

Perhaps the solution is to get back to basics. What did the first 100 do? They submitted to a process of ego deflation and personal transformation which freed them from alcohol by giving them a relationship with Power. They fostered their new power by helping others experience a Spiritual Awakening through this same conversion process - giving them a daily reprieve; helping them maintain and improve their personal spiritual condition.

Lets use our vital current spirit of fellowship to return to our roots:

1. Accessing Power through the Big Books program of recovery experienced in the Steps!
2. Helping others find Power through the vital current of the Fellowship of the Spirit!

We need both meetings and Steps to survive and flourish.

The spirit of fellowship acknowledges our humanity. Without it, we become disconnected and heartless! With it, we have a forum for freedom.

The Fellowship of the Spirit recognizes our divinity. Without it, we become impotent and soulless! With it, we have a formula for freedom.

Are we human beings trying to have a spiritual experience? Or, are we spiritual beings trying to have a human experience?

YES! Both are true!

Is it time for the AA Fellowship to pause, take a breath, pray a prayer, and ask for guidance?

Is it time to set aside our slogans, our beliefs, our understanding of recovery?

Is it time to revisit our textbook, the Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous?

Is it time to reexamine our personal experience of each of the Twelve Steps?

Is it time for a new experience of awakening?

Is it time for an Alcoholics Anonymous renaissance?

IF NOT NOW - WHEN?

THANKS for listening.

My prayer and hope is that these thoughts are given serious consideration, are discussed openly and results in specific actions!

Herb K

www.herbk.com

herbk12@hotmail.com