

Few would argue that A.A. cofounder Bill Wilson was ahead of his time. In this reprint from the September 1947 issue of "Guideposts", Bill's first nationally published magazine article, he poses a question that resonates today.

### **IS A.A. FOR ALCOHOLICS ONLY?**

Our most enthusiastic friends think Alcoholics Anonymous is a modern miracle. So they ask, "Why can't A.A. principles be applied to any personal problem?" The world today is a problem world because it is full of problem people. We are now on the greatest emotional bender of all time; practically no one of us is free from the tightening coils of insecurity, fear, resentment and avarice. If A.A. can revive an alcoholic by removing these paralyzing liabilities from him, it must be strong medicine. Perhaps the rest of us could use the same prescription.

Not being reformers, nor representing any particular sectarian or medical point of view, we A.A.'s can only tell the story of what has happened to us and suggest the simple (but not easy) principles upon which, as ex-drinkers, our very lives now depend.

Fifty thousand alcoholics (today A.A. has nearly two million members and 100,000 groups worldwide) - the men and women members of A.A. - have found release from their fatal compulsion to drink. Each month two thousand more set foot on the A.A. high road to freedom from obsession so subtly powerful that once engulfed, few alcoholics over the centuries have ever survived. We alcoholics have always been the despair of society and, as our lives became totally unmanageable, we despair of ourselves. Obsession is the word for it.

But now, largely through A.A., this impossible soul sickness is being banished. Each recovering alcoholic carries his tale to the next. In a brief dozen years the A.A. message has spread, chain letter fashion, over the United States, Canada and a dozen foreign lands. Obsession is being exorcised wholesale.

What then, is this message whose power can restore the alcoholic his sanity and thenceforth enable him to live soberly, happily and usefully in a very confused world? The A.A. Recovery Program relates it as follows:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understand Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
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 of our affairs.

Simple, these principles, yet a large order indeed. When one tries to apply them he is bound to collide with a most heavy obstacle. That obstacle is one's own pride. Who, for example, cares to admit complete defeat? Who wishes to admit to himself and others his serious defects of character? Who relishes forgiving his enemies and making amends to people he has harmed? Who would like to give freely of himself without ever demanding reward? How many can really bow before "the God of their own understanding" in real faith that a Higher Power will do for them what they cannot do for themselves?

Yet A.A.'s find that if we go "all out" in daily practice of our 12 Steps we soon commence to live in a new, unbelievable world. Our pride yields to humility and our cynicism to faith. We begin to know serenity. We learn enough patience, tolerance, honesty and service to subdue our former masters - insecurity, resentment and unsatisfied dreams of power. We find that God can be

relied upon; that our strength can come out of weakness; that perhaps only those who have tasted the fruits of dependence on a Higher Power can understand the true meaning of personal liberty, freedom of the human spirit.

For us of A.A. these are not theories; they are the prime facts of our very existence. The average A.A. member feels that he deserves little personal credit for his new way of life. He knows he might never have achieved enough humility to find God unless he had been beaten to his knees by alcohol. He was once that egocentric, but in the end it had to be God.

Yet we of A.A. cannot but feel that great things certainly await those who earnestly try our 12 Steps substituting their own distressing problem for that of alcohol. Nor do we think everyone needs to be so completely beaten as we were. To us, grace is an infinite abundance which surely can be shared by all who will renounce their former selves enough to truly seek it out. We often feel like shouting this ancient charter of men's liberty from the rooftops of thousands of our homes - A.A. homes that would never have been, but for the grace of God.

#### WHO IS HE?

Bill is a Vermonter, tall, lanky and homespun. He learned to drink in the First World War when he was in France. On his return home, it took him tormented years to realize what was obvious to others - that he had not learned how to drink and could not trust himself not to drink.

Being a canny, shrewd New Englander, Bill achieved a fairly immediate success on Wall Street, but all the adroitness and luck in the world could never hold up against his alcoholic obsession. Nothing and nobody could hold up against it - except Lois, the childhood sweetheart and wife who had sent an idealistic lad to war and had got herself back a two-headed problem.

Often hospitalized, Bill had been pronounced incurable by Dr. William D. Silkworth, a well-known authority on alcoholism, who in recent years has become a sort of patron saint of A.A. On his last visit to the hospital, Bill was seen by a friend who had himself recovered from alcoholism by spiritual means. This friend urged Bill to confess his faults, make restitution to those he had injured, turn to God for relief from alcoholism and help others.

Bill rebelled for he was an agnostic. But, fully realizing his hopeless condition, alone and despairing in his hospital room, he said to himself, "At last I'm ready to try anything" and then with little hope and no faith at all, he cried out, "If there is a God, will he show himself?" This was the beginning of A.A. -

For God did answer.

Editor-in-Chief, Guideposts, 1947