

## SHARING THE GIFT

When Bill Wilson's longtime drinking companion, Ebby Thatcher, appeared in Bill's kitchen, it forged the first link in a wonderful chain of what we now refer to as 12-Step calls. It was the first time in human history we are aware of that a solution for alcoholism was passed from one alcoholic to another. This was incredibly good news. In Bill's own words: "He had come to pass his experience along to me – if I cared to have it. I was shocked, but interested. Certainly I was interested. I had to be, for I was hopeless."

Later, while Bill was still in his hospital bed recovering from alcohol withdrawal, he remembered some of Ebby's words: "My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these [spiritual] principles in all my affairs. Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. ... For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead." Here, on page 14 of the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, we find the first of what will be many references to the fact that working with others is NOT a recovery option.

Flush with his 'religious conversion' experience in the hospital, Bill set out to fulfill Ebby's edict. His attempts to 'convert' other alcoholics succeeded only in keeping himself sober. Bill failed completely with his first 64 prospects. Bill shared his discouragement with Dr. Silkworth and was told that unless he first discussed the PROBLEM in depth, the alcoholic was not likely to buy in to the SOLUTION. Bill had forgotten that Dr. Silkworth had first told him his "theory" – the disease concept of alcoholism – prior to Ebby outlining the solution and program of action. He had failed to "pass on" the exact nature of the malady. Once that piece of the puzzle was in place, his efforts no longer fell on deaf ears. Our book refers to that as: "properly armed with the facts about himself". It is interesting to note that in the original manuscript the passage reads: "...certain medical information."

When Bill reached out to Dr. Bob Smith unsolicited, it created a profound effect. In Dr. Bob's own words: "He gave me information about the subject of alcoholism which was undoubtedly helpful. 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." The fire that was lit in Dr. Bob was to be carried directly to over 5,000 alcoholics through the use of the 12-Step call. Some came from requests and others were unannounced visits. Indeed, out of the 43 personal stories in the Big Book, 27 of them began their sober adventure as a direct result of an unsolicited 12-Step call.

Chapter 7, first paragraph: "Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our *twelfth suggestion*: Carry this message TO other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail. Remember they are very ill". Over the years, as AA has moved from a program-based spiritual entity, to a fellowship-based social entity, the fabric of this step has been frayed. Meetings, meetings and more meetings are pushed as THE ticket to recovery, while the action of the 12 Steps, particularly working with others has been pushed into the background. As a result, the powerful spiritual enthusiasm which is a by-product of 12-Step work, particularly the 12-Step call itself, seems difficult to experience. How many of us at one time or another have asked the secret question, "Is this all there is?" How many of us have felt that we were getting short changed in our recovery? How many of us have dared to wonder if the experience of the first 100 wasn't indeed closed off to us? That the phrase, "...we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed" were just words on a page? We believe that these are common concerns among many of us. Placing spiritual enthusiasm aside, just the relative percentage of permanent recoveries we experience today versus 30 or 40 years ago is alarming enough.

The commonly heard reasons for these realities sound like the rationalizations and justifications of the untreated alcoholic. Finger pointing to the external. It's because of the court slips, the treatment centers, the young people, the drugs, etc. ad-nauseum. In daring to follow the same directions in our group inventories as we do with our individual inventories, we believe the answer may lie with having dropped the ball when it comes to our primary purpose: Carrying the message TO the alcoholic.

As we travel around, we find there is a fresh new hunger alive and growing in Alcoholics Anonymous. "Surely you will meet some of us," is a promise that's coming true. The joy and spiritual power many of us have felt in sharing this gift with others is contagious. "But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recoverED, and been given the power to help others." We find there are just as many, if not more, opportunities for 12-Step calls as ever before. When placed in front of an alcoholic, who is alone and terrified, we get the strong sense that we are privileged to be at the right place at the right time doing the right thing. The illusion that we are somehow separate from our fellows is smashed. The realization that this new power we have been given can be used to help heal others comes strongly. The experience of working with suffering alcoholics draws us nearer to that profound sense of gratitude and helps provide us with a wonderful opportunity to honor that power which has restored us to sanity. We become active co-creators in our own spiritual experience.

Before we go out on a call, many of us pause to say thanks in prayer and to ask that our motives be grounded in selflessness. In addition, many of us take a few minutes to re-read Chapter 7 "Working With Others." There are many great directions in this chapter coming from the experience of the first 100. In the ensuing decades, there have been 2 major shifts that were not realities when the Big Book was written. Roughly 90% of all 12-Step calls today are made to people who have been to AA previously and roughly 80% to people who are dually addicted. The dual addiction aspect can be easily surmounted with more information on drug as well as alcohol withdrawal. The detoxification process may be a little more complicated, that's all. However, the call to the person who has already been to AA provides us with a greater challenge. Virtually all the information concerning 12-Step calls found in our basic text assumes that the person we are seeing has never heard of AA before. It was written from the point of view that we are to be delivering new information. The prospect was immediately excited that there may be a way out he had never heard of before. The question now is, what do we say to the man who has already heard the usual identification pitch? For whom establishing rapport is not enough? From one of our members:

Several months ago, I knocked on a motel door at 3 am. A shaken man fearfully asked me inside. I reached out my hand and introduced myself as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. "Yeah I know," he said. "I tried it before and it didn't work." After pouring the wine down the sink and getting on our knees, we began to talk. One alcoholic to ANother. This man had been sober before. "Sobriety wasn't enough," he said. I agreed and we began to talk about RECOVERY. We talked about alcoholism as a disease and that while we had once used alcohol as a treatment, our physical, emotional and spiritual decay rendered drinking no longer effective. We agreed that, based on sad experience, "putting the plug in the jug" hardly sufficed for a real alcoholic. "Frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices." I related some of my own experience and that I had felt no sense of power until I had surrendered to the spiritual action inherent in the process. He related that he had attended meetings regularly and stayed sober but never felt happy or free and eventually returned to drink. This scenario is all too common. The phrase, "Alcoholics Anonymous" is the title of a textbook. It is not endless meetings. When we greet a man with "Hey, I'll take you to a meeting," are we not sending the wrong message? Especially to a man who could not stay sober on fellowship support in the past? Perhaps we should try to find out what he did NOT try and focus on that instead.

When the new man says, "I've tried AA and it doesn't work", what do we tell him? When he says, "I've been sober before and it wasn't enough," how shall we respond? We believe we must try to open the window of distinction between sobriety and recovery. The "something new" for him will be the inner feeling of peace he receives by doing the steps. The peace he never found by 'plug in the jug' and 'lots of meetings' instructions from the past. Alcohol is the symptom for our disease called alcoholism. Let's give the new man some fresh hope to chew on. And, let's try to insure that when we do take him to meet the members of our Home Group, he will find a safe haven from the wars that he has survived.

From Dr. Bob's Nightmare:

"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.

From page 129: "It is well to let him go as far as he likes in helping other alcoholics. During those first days of convalescence, this will do more to insure his sobriety than anything else." Perhaps the greatest sense of joy of all is to be out on a 12-Step call with someone who is new to the program himself. To be there to witness such power in action is nothing short of a miraculous hair-raising opportunity. Don't miss it!

Every Step in our wonderful 12-Step process points directly to Step 12. The whole purpose of the previous 11 is to arrive at the threshold of Step 12. We are delivered to recovery so that we may share our experience with others. There are 147 promises in the Big Book. We have been given so much. The greatest gift of all is that we have been placed in a position of usefulness to others. We invite you to help us celebrate this gift!

From page 102: "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."

## TRUST THE PROCESS

We often hear that this is a journey rather than a destination.

We each must begin our own journey from *exactly* where we are by taking a single step. Your journey will be yours and yours alone. It will not be the same as any other's journey and it should not be since we are different people with different experiences. You should never be discouraged or ashamed because your journey is different in any way from another's journey. What someone else experiences or feels or finds or stumbles over on their journey should not make any difference to your journey. Your journey is unique to you and will take you *exactly* where you are supposed to go at *exactly* the right time.

What matters is that your journey has begun. Cherish it, always.

## EXPERIENCE THE JOURNEY!

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