

October 2020

£1

The Fellowship's  
RECOVERY MAGAZINE

# share

Produced for members  
by members

Our Meeting Between Meetings



# Take time to...

## THE TWELVE STEPS

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 the care of 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 understood 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 our affairs.

## THE TWELVE TRADITIONS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An AA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.



## share

The Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous  
in England & Wales

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# share

our meeting in print

**OCTOBER 2020**

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*Front and back cover photos:*  
Lesley



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## the preamble

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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# editorial

Dear Reader

... **W**AKE up and smell the roses. The beautiful picture on our front cover this month reminds me that taking time to stop and reflect is a vital part of the spiritual journey we have embarked on. Step Ten is such a wonderful tool, supporting us in continuing the cleansing process which we undertake through the Twelve Steps of our Programme. This Step encourages us to examine our thoughts and actions continually during each day – not as a stick to beat ourselves up with but as a loving act of self-care. It helps us to reflect on and keep our awareness on our own behaviours and our willingness to change those behaviours where necessary. By focussing on the positive, particularly during challenging times, the day's end can feel as peaceful as the beautiful sunset on this month's back cover. A day well-lived reflected by a feeling of serenity not just on what has been achieved.

The Serenity Prayer is such an important part of our Fellowship – in this country it's how each meeting ends. As we continue to move slowly and carefully out of lockdown, the words of this prayer really resonate with me, reminding me how important it is to continue to take a personal inventory and recognise when I need to have courage or when I need to have acceptance. Such wisdom takes time but practising reflection and connecting with my Higher Power helps me to be honest with myself on a daily basis.

The gift of sobriety requires daily maintenance. *"Since recovery from alcoholism is life itself to us, it is imperative that we preserve in full strength our means of survival."* (12&12 p.181). Have a peaceful day, every day.

\*\*\*\* \* \* \* \*

## NEXT MONTH: STEP ELEVEN

*We invite articles on your experience, strength and hope. This month we are particularly looking for those on Steps and Traditions Twelve and One for the December 2020 and January 2021 issues.*



## STEP TEN:

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

# STEP TEN LOOK WITHIN

ENJOY hearing people’s stories in AA, and what I am really interested in is how people work the Steps on a daily basis. Therefore, I hope it may be of use to at least one person to share how I use journaling to work the Steps.

When I wake up, I usually have a period of meditation, sometimes on a phrase or word or using my breath. When I get out of bed I usually go on my knees and say the Serenity Prayer, Third Step prayer, Seventh Step prayer and St. Francis prayer. I will get a cuppa and read a recovery passage on my phone. In my journal I write the header ‘I feel’ and list three things I feel. This helps me tap into my emotions and see what I’m working on that day. A ‘Wheel of Emotions’ is helpful with this as I still don’t understand a lot of emotions. Then I write ‘Already Achieved’ and one thing each for body, mind, spirit and soul. I usually write ‘reading for mind, meditation for spirit, and prayer for soul’, so the journal

is a good prompt if I haven’t done these things already. Next header is ‘Intentions’ and I list three intentions, which may be to go to a meeting or text a recovery friend. After that ‘Manifestations’ which may be someone hearing the message or getting well. When I retire at night, I write three things I’m grateful for, three things I let go of, and three beautiful moments of the day. This gets me in a state of gratitude and acceptance.

I answer ten questions too which helps me take an inventory and see if there is any action I could take. Have I

1. been resentful?
2. been honest?
3. admitted when wrong?
4. apologised where needed?
5. acted out of fear?
6. shared with another AA if required?
7. thought of others?
8. been loving and kind?
9. prayed and meditated?
10. reached out?

It sounds like a lot but it takes no more than five minutes each morning and night and helps me have a daily practice of contemplation and checking in.

Plus, writing empties my head onto the page instead of having a racing brain. It works for me.

ANON

---

## STEP TEN

# GROWING IN SOBRIETY

**H**AVE been sober a little while and at times I need to have my Programme refreshed. The greatest way to do this for me is through Step work with a sponsee. Last night me and another recovering alcoholic got together by video call and read Step Ten in the Big Book and then in the 12&12. And funnily enough, it was exactly what I needed to hear. It usually is when I do any AA reading, meeting or talk with another AA. God works through us.

What I refreshed is my inventory taking. One of my core defects is low self-worth. It's easy for me to look at where I have gone wrong.

*"...a wholesale miracle has taken place."* (BB p.xv)

What I don't do is look at my assets or what I do well, so mine and my sponsee's homework is to write a list of our assets. I love that I don't need to only share instructions

with others but I can also do them myself!

I realised yesterday I had acted rashly at work and had the reminder that,

*"Nothing pays off like restraint of tongue and pen."* (12&12 p.93).

This is what I love about this Programme, our spiritual practices can be refreshed at any time, I never stagnate and I keep learning. For me Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve aren't the maintenance Steps, they are the growing Steps.

ALI, Whitley Bay

## DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to AA's future. To place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united; for on AA unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come.

# STEP TEN

# LOVE AND TOLERANCE IS OUR CODE

**M**Y first lesson in forgiveness, tolerance and understanding came from an unexpected direction – my teenage son. I had found a good sponsor, who guided me through the Steps. “*Love and tolerance of others is our code.*” (BB p.84) made a strong impression on me. Easier said than done, I thought. But I was willing to give it a try. At that time, my son had one of his first girlfriends, a fellow

*“...can we...live to good purpose under all conditions?”*  
(12&12 p.90)

student in their sixth-form studies. She was truly beautiful – her parents were wealthy people in Moscow who sent their daughter to England for her education. All was well, until she finished with my son to start seeing someone else. That ‘someone else’ happened to be the school’s Head Boy. He was tall, good looking, clever, athletic – and played in a band. He was the boy who had everything. Some months later, my

## Tradition 7

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son went to a film festival – with his former girlfriend. Although they were no longer ‘an item’, they remained good friends and went to certain social events together.

That made a firm impression on me. If my girlfriend had finished with me at the age of 17, I would have been filled with anger, resentment and self-pity. I would

have been planning the most unspeakable revenge on both of them – especially as he was ‘God’s Gift to Women’. But not my son. He possessed the emotional maturity that I need a Twelve-Step Programme for. *“Love and tolerance of others is our code.”* – a daily lesson learned.

ANON

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## STEP TEN

# A QUIET ROUTINE

**M**Y name is Helen, I am an alcoholic and I am writing to share my personal experience of recovery during lockdown here in Spain. When I look back at the initial months of strict confinement, I almost feel a certain nostalgia for the quiet routine I got into on a daily basis – phone calls, housework that had been put off, Steps Ten and Eleven and the highlight of going out shopping for a friend and getting a takeaway coffee at the baker’s! A rare find but then again, I never did have trouble finding a drink when I needed one.

I have to admit that I got quite used to life with fewer distractions; yet when more freedom came back in, I grasped those possibilities and

really relished spending time with dear friends once again. I wasn’t able to attend video-conference meetings and very often I asked, and continue to ask myself, whether I am still ‘in the middle of the bed’. My main tool in order to stay connected has been the telephone and I reverted to the long phone calls I used to value so much as a newcomer. I thank my Higher Power for that training! Another anchor was and is a weekly Big Book study over the phone with my dear friend and sponsee. The formal structure of that I find very reassuring.

Whatever happens in my life, one day at a time, I pray to stay close to my beloved Fellowship and not forget where I came from.

HELEN, *Fuengirola*

*“The basic principles... hold good for individuals with many different lifestyles... nationalities.”*

(BB p.xxii)

# STEP TEN

## EMERGING FROM LOCKDOWN

**E**MERGING from the Covid-19 lockdown this July draws parallels with my experience of recovery from the disease of alcoholism. Finally, after several years of battle with the disease, I gave in and surrendered. I accepted my powerlessness over my drinking. I accepted the fact that no matter how many ideas I cooked up to try and curb and control and contain my alcohol addiction – none worked. When I accepted this completely, I asked for the help from a sponsor and started to work through the Steps. For the first time in my life I did what was suggested. Finally, the desire to drink was lifted.

Exeter airport is not too far away from my house: one of the first things I noticed when lockdown began back in March was the quiet sky overhead. March began three months of almost perfect, uninterrupted, blue sky. In early recovery my mind began to clear. Step One brought a sense of peace and surrender and quickly led to Steps Two and Three. I think one of the few good things to emerge

from the Covid crisis has been the peace of the skies and the roads which I believe has been marked and appreciated by many of us. The loudness of Spring birds was particularly remarked upon and noticed during this time, by me and my neighbours.

In early recovery moments of serenity were followed by even longer moments of peace. I began to do as suggested in the 'Just for Today' card – to take half an hour out for reflection and relaxation. I'll never forget the first time

*"...the moment I fully accepted them, the effect was electric." (BB p.14)*

I saw the sea, in early recovery. The sparkle of the waves and the peaceful quality of that first morning by the sea in company with some fellow AAs will forever stay with me. I began to notice birdsong, flowers in the hedgerows. Years later my love and closeness to nature has become a passion and a sustenance through difficult times. I have turned to it more and more for solace and joy as I believe many have during recent months especially. I began to look outward to family and friends. Empathy grew in me quickly and desire to help those suffering from

alcoholism – much service work followed – making tea, Twelfth Step calls, school talks. Empathy also grew for friends outside the Fellowship and for family – just as empathy has grown in recent times for my neighbours. I have enjoyed interactions with those I met on my daily walk – just little chats about this and that – enjoying a sense as never before of our common shared humanity, a sense of us all being in this together.

This exactly echoes the experience of sharing the lifeboat of recovery with my Fellows in AA. Like those who have survived a shipwreck we feel a common, close bond and strive to do whatever is in our power to help fellow sufferers. Of course, family and friends have been dearer to me since March than ever before – an experience reflected in the world around me. In recovery I aim to be straightforward in these friendships, to be openminded,

willing to tolerate – not to fear or hate their worst and to try and love them whatever arises, which is an attitude that I have cultivated during recent months with my neighbours – to greater or lesser success!! But at least I am trying! One of the things I think the present crisis has flagged up is also paradoxically our need for space in our relationships with others. In recovery I try to talk about such issues with friends and family so we can try and live in greater harmony.

As the years have progressed in recovery, much has been restored to me. I have looked more and more outside myself and discovered joy in returning to some of those things that gave me happiness before the awful disease of alcoholism took hold – pastimes, hobbies, passions. AA has given me my life back and moreover given me peace and life and love beyond my imagination. As the world



## *Hints and Tips for a Sober Christmas and New Year*

The Share Team would love our readers to share their own Hints and Tips about staying sober over Christmas and The New Year.

- What is your experience?
- What works for you?
- What would you suggest for a newcomer?

Send your Hints and Tips to: [AAShare@gsogb.org.uk](mailto:AAShare@gsogb.org.uk)

Or post them to: The Editor, SHARE, General Service Office, PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ

Deadline Friday, 16th October 2020. For publication in our December issue.

slowly emerges from lockdown, I hope not to forget what I have learnt from the extraordinary experience we have all shared. I hope in recovery to keep doing those simple basic things that have worked for me every day of my recovery. To take time out in the morning to get a better perspective

on the day ahead, to take my own inventory only, to try and be a spoke in other people's wheels – to see what I can contribute to the day. At least I can try! And for the first time in my life I began to experience real and enduring long moments of peace of mind.

ROZ

---

## STEP TEN

**M**Y name is Matthew and I am an alcoholic. At the time of writing in July 2020 by the Grace of God, the power of the Fellowship and following the suggestions of my sponsor I have nearly two years of continuous sobriety. This is truly a miracle; I could never have conceived of two weeks without alcohol or two hours with a peaceful mind as I have now achieved. Before I even joined the Fellowship, I was worried about Step Four as I felt I couldn't cope with beating myself up over past conduct. Even after joining it took me five months to take this Step and Step Five, as I still had the same fear until it was explained how I could clear away the wreckage of my past. Having done so I felt a new cleanness and had a plan of action to make amends for my behaviours or allowances for the behaviour of others depending on the situation.

My sponsor has summarised the AA way of life as, "Trust God,

clean house, and help others." This brings me to Step Ten, the cleaning house element. At a recent meeting the Chair said that of course he has made mistakes in life since getting sober, he is human. Like him I make mistakes and it is not making mistakes that causes a risk of drinking for me, it is trying to cover up or justify mistakes and understanding this helps my sobriety. Like everyone, alcoholic or not, I face problems in life. The book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions speaks of the emotional hangover, born of negative emotions like anger, fear and jealousy. I know that to live a serene and sober life I cannot afford these. I find, "*A "spot-check" inventory taken in the midst of such disturbances can be of very great help in quieting stormy emotions.*" (12&12 p.93).

As a practical example of using a Step Ten spot-check in everyday life I think of the charity shop where I volunteer. Sometimes my customers can seem demanding,

unreasonable or rude and as I am front-of-house I have little chance to avoid them! When I encounter someone like this instead of being resentful or surly, I am able to reflect on the encounter and then ask for a break when I can run through an inventory. "Have I considered that the other person may be having a bad day? Has not been brought up like me to say "please" and "thank you"; or perhaps has communication problems? Does the other person have the luxury of a Twelve-Step Programme like ours?" After all, as the foreword to the First Edition says, "...we are sure that our way of living has its advantages for all." (BB p.xiii).

Another example relates to my behaviour and thinking. Recently I was asked to help a friend's son mend a puncture on his bicycle as I am a keen cyclist. A time was suggested, I planned a session showing the boy how to keep his bike in good order and I went to the bike shop to buy some spare tubes and simple tools for him. Twenty minutes before the appointed time to meet, the appointment was cancelled by the parent and then an alternative time later that day also cancelled. I could have become quite angry and resentful about this. Had I not set aside my time and spent money to help someone, and now they were throwing it back in my face?

*"Seeing is believing to most families who have lived with a drinker."*

(BB p.135)

Instead I took a look at Step Ten. First of all, the other party had a very good reason for cancelling on both occasions. I had been the one that had pushed to get the job done sooner rather than later and it was *my* will that this be the case, even though I dressed it up in concern that the child be able to ride again sooner. Secondly the friend had asked me to help mend a puncture, not give a lesson about bike maintenance and spend money on spare parts and tools. I had been trying to be the director! As so often in the past before I achieved sobriety my act of kindness had, subconsciously, been offered on my terms rather than the recipient's. By making my spot-check I cast away resentment and anger. A new appointment to meet is to be arranged. The friend (unless they read this!) will be completely unaware that these feelings had bubbled up even for a very short time, just as my customers are unaware that I may have feelings like that about them. *"Courtesy, kindness, justice, and love are the keynotes by which we may come into harmony with practically anybody."* (12&12 p.95). By living in harmony with others and myself, I can retain my serenity – and Step Ten helps me achieve that harmony.

May God bless you and keep you.

MATTHEW W. Wallingford  
(Oxon) *Bridge to Living*

# STEP TEN

## I'M THE AUTHOR

**A**S I was the author of my searching and fearless moral inventory in Step Four, so I am the author of my personal inventory in Step Ten. What was evident in my Step Four was that there was nothing in it that I could deny or argue with because it was me who had written it. I was the author. It wasn't a social enquiry report or a psychiatric report that had been written about me and which I could find fault with,

accusing others of misinterpreting what I had said. No, the three columns system brought me face to face with the only person who was responsible for messing my life up and that person was ME.

My personal inventory is the broom that keeps my house clean. Over time I learned the benefits of spot-check inventories as I go about my everyday life. They usually take the form of telling myself to shut-up when

## TRADITIONS CHECKLIST

### Tradition Ten

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



1. Do I ever give the impression that there really is an "AA opinion" on Antabuse? Tranquilisers?
2. Doctors? Psychiatrists? Churches? Hospitals? Prisons? Alcohol? The Government? Legalising marijuana? Vitamins? Al-Anon? Alateen?
3. Can I honestly share my own personal experience concerning any of those without giving the impression I am stating the "AA opinion"?
4. What in AA history gave rise to our Tradition 10?
5. Have I had a similar experience in my own AA life?
6. What would AA be without this Tradition? Where would I be?
7. Do I breach this or any of its supporting Traditions in subtle, perhaps unconscious, ways?
8. How can I manifest the spirit of this Tradition in my personal life outside AA? Inside AA?

someone gets in my way when I am out shopping and I find myself starting to take their inventory. It's obvious to me that such people don't realise that I'm a very important alcoholic who mustn't be inconvenienced!

I became aware quite some time ago that I'm at my best when I am having breakfast, showering, dressing etc. but something seems to occur within me when I step outside of my home – because people seem to be waiting for me just so they can ruin my day! Of course, the reality is that I have absolutely no evidence whatsoever to prove my claim because no one is out to ruin my day, only I can do that. So, as I go through my day, I am able to

*“It should continue for our lifetime.”*

(BB p.84)

correct my negative thinking by taking spot-check inventories. The root cause of my negative thinking is always that old ‘number one offender’ – resentment. It still hasn't been removed but as my first sponsor used to say, “It will be removed when you stop practising it.”

For me, it's still the three columns for my daily reviews and I also use three columns for my gratitude list – I'm grateful for... The cause... How it makes me feel. It's accepting people as they are, instead of how I think they should be, that I continue to work on. I'm okay with places and things so I have made progress.

KEVIN R

## SHARE is our story, share yours

**There are many AA members who are unable to go to meetings; the housebound, some single parents with children, those in the armed services, on oil rigs, in prisons or hospitals, who rely on SHARE for their meeting between meetings – and sometimes instead of one. Please take the time to write and share your experience, strength and hope with them.**

Whether you are a newcomer, old-timer, or just an ordinary member we would like to hear your story just like at any other meeting. Not only that but putting pen to paper can enhance your own sobriety and that of the whole Fellowship.

You don't need to be a polished author. Spelling and grammar will all be amended if necessary. Don't forget 'Short is Sweet'. We love your articles but over 1,000 words will not be considered for publication nor do we publish poetry or obituaries.



Each issue of SHARE always features that month's corresponding Step and Tradition (January Step/Tradition 1 through to December Step/Tradition 12). We need your article at least two months before the relevant topic is due to appear, for example, for Step or Tradition Three (March) by mid-January, and so on.

*Send your contribution to:* The Editor, SHARE, General Service Office, PO Box 1,10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ or make an online submission via <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Fellowship-Magazines/SHARE-Magazine/Submit-a-Contribution>

# PROGRESS NOT PERFECTION

HAVING washed up on the shores of Alcoholics Anonymous in the autumn of 2008, I spent a very desolate three months still drinking but attending meetings. I knew exactly what I should be doing but could not make that final leap. That final act of letting go. At this stage I went to a treatment centre and for me it was a temporary break from home and routine with all the excuses to drink that obligations and relationships gave me. It was what I needed. I was ready to listen. The advice when leaving was, "Get to as many meetings as possible. Get a sponsor and start taking the Steps." This I duly did. For me the first three Steps were about stopping drinking and committing to a Programme of recovery. The overriding lesson I had learned by then was that putting down the drink was just the beginning and that if I wanted to have a sober life, I had to change.

A 'searching and fearless moral inventory' seemed a very good place to start. I had been introduced to the column method in the Big Book at the treatment centre but it had seemed like an

academic form filling exercise, at the time. My sponsor had written hers as an autobiography and that seemed more personal, so I started off down that path. Wanting to do it as thoroughly as I could, I had written pages and pages. I was very pleased with myself and was already planning which publisher was going to have this wonderful autobiography. It had taken ages and I hadn't reached the age of five in my narrative and I was sixty-two years old! This wasn't going to work.

*"What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition."*

(BB p.85)

I put Step Four on the back burner for a week or so, until I read an article in SHARE magazine by a lady who made me face the truth. There was nothing wrong with either of the methods. It was just the old enemy, procrastination. She described how she just wrote down a list of defects of character and got on with it. I found a list of defects in a book given to me by a member with many years of sobriety. I took each one in turn and asked the following questions, "When had I been like this – resentful, fearful, dishonest etc? What was the cause or trigger? How did I behave? What could I have done differently? What

does this tell me about me? What needs to change?”. It was slow progress at first but as my way of thinking developed, I speeded up and stayed up and wrote through until dawn one night to get it finished. I felt a huge sense of relief and after a day or two went back over everything I had written looking for common threads and repeated patterns. These formed the basis of my Step Five discussion with my sponsor. Some people advocate destroying the Step Four inventory as a symbolic gesture. I kept mine as a reference, a reminder.

My perspective changed. I no longer saw defects of character as ‘sins’ for which I should be remorseful and feel shame. Instead I saw them as inadequacies to be remedied. I also realised that the remedy lay in the rest of the Steps and the solution was to follow the rest of the Programme to the best of my ability. My defects of character did not magically disappear overnight. However, thanks to the Programme, I recognise when they raise their unwelcome heads and am far more able to deal with them. It is an ongoing process. I aim for progress not perfection.

*SHEILA, BS Lincolnshire*

# THEMES FOR 2021

**Due to the fabulous response during 2020, we will continue to have an additional focus in specific issues:**

## **JANUARY – ‘Newcomers’**

How did you feel as a newcomer to the Fellowship?

How do you support a newcomer?

## **MARCH – ‘How to keep sobriety to the forefront’**

You have a period of sobriety under your belt –

What keeps you living sober?

Does life get in the way?

## **JUNE – ‘Prison’**

Did you find sobriety in prison?

Have you enhanced your journey by doing service in prison?

## **SEPTEMBER – ‘Service in my Home Group’**

Were you sponsored into service?

Do you find AA literature helpful?

## **DECEMBER – ‘A Sober Christmas and New Year’**

What is your experience?

What works for you?

What would you suggest for a newcomer?

## **STOP PRESS!!!**

**GSO York have decided to make back copies of SHARE magazine freely available to prisons by applying to GSO via your Region.**

# FELLOWSHIP SURVEY NEEDS YOUR HELP

## COPING WITH COVID-19

The Fellowship in GB and Continental Europe has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in astonishing ways. To capture these actions, the Two-Phase 2020 Survey will be done exclusively online\* using email, web etc.

**Phase 1: Groups' Survey** (Group Contacts/Secretaries): Phase One is used to select a stratified random sample of +-250 Groups' members, group sizes and geographical locations in all AA Regions.

**Phase 2: Members' Survey:** All members of the +-250 Groups selected in Phase 1 will be invited to complete a separate members' questionnaire.

Each phase will also have questions relating to COVID-19 and an openended question so Groups and individuals can provide feedback in their own words.

Together we can overcome COVID-19 challenges – but we need your help!

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. Check your Group contact received Phase 1 Groups' Survey.
2. Confirm your Group submitted responses to the Groups' Survey.
3. If selected for Phase 2 complete questionnaire ASAP.

*\*If anyone wants a paper version, they can download print and mail it back to GSO.*

# ADAPTING TO UNCERTAINTY

## CORNERSTONE OF RECOVERY

Nothing in AA's history has tested our basic tenets of recovery like the coronavirus pandemic. Meeting another alcoholic and sharing experience, strength and hope is a cornerstone of our recovery.

Uncertainty may be the new normal, but we are certain, with your help, survey results will:

- Assist members in personal recovery.
- Give our leaders key data to make sound decisions.
- Provide professionals an understanding of our Fellowship and the solution we offer.

## CARRY THE MESSAGE

The General Service Board (GSB) of AA GB has conducted a members' survey every five years since 1972 in order to:

- Fulfil our Primary Purpose in the most effective ways.
- Keep current on changing characteristics of the membership.
- Estimate membership numbers in the Fellowship.
- Inform members, Conference and GSB regarding the best use of resources.
- Communicate survey results with professionals and the Fellowship.

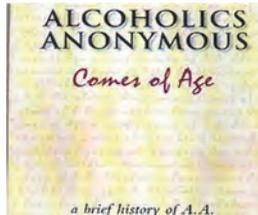
*Enquiries: trustee.easternregion@gso.org.uk*

ALL INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL

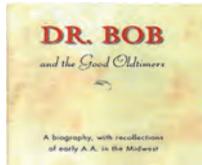
# AA Conference Approved Books

## New Items and Revised Prices

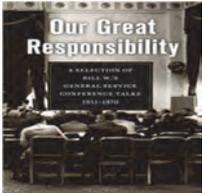
### AA Comes of Age Soft Back

	<p><b>AA Comes Of Age: a brief history of A.A.</b> Written when nearly half a century had gone by since AA's historic 1955 Convention in St. Louis, when the founding members passed on to the entire Fellowship the responsibility for the Three Legacies</p> <p><b>Item code 2121      Price £6.00</b></p>
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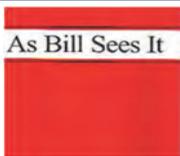
### Dr Bob and the Good Oldtimers Soft Back

	<p><b>Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers Soft Cover</b> A biography, with recollections of early A.A. in the Midwest</p> <p><b>Item Code 2181      Price £6.00</b></p>
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### Our Great Responsibility Soft Back

	<p><b>Our Great Responsibility</b> A selection of Bill W's General Service Conference Talks, 1951 - 1970. 270 pages, softcover with over 60 black &amp; white and colour images. Derived from original audio recordings.</p> <p><b>Item Code 6070      Price £6.00</b></p>
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### As Bill Sees It

	<p><b>As Bill Sees It</b> The A.A. Way of Life (selected writings of A.A.'s co-founder).</p> <p><b>Item Code 2100      Price £5.00</b></p>
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## Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Pocket Size



### Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

How members of Alcoholics Anonymous recover and how the society functions.

Item code 2250

Price £5.00

## The Home Group: Heartbeat of AA



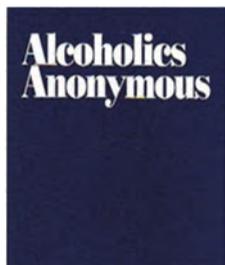
### The Home Group: Heartbeat of AA

Selected Stories from the AA Grapevine.

Item Code 2230

Price £5.00

## Alcoholics Anonymous Fourth Edition (2001) Hard Back



### This is the Big Book

Rumour has it that at Bill's suggestion the first edition was printed on very heavy paper to make it look bigger, thicker and therefore seem to be better value for money! Hence the 'Big Book' nickname.

Often described as the basic textbook of our Fellowship the first 164 pages describe our recovery program and have hardly changed since that first edition. The personal stories contained at the back of the book are changed from one edition to the next to reflect changing social situations.

Item Code 2020

Price £8.00

## Alcoholics Anonymous Soft Back

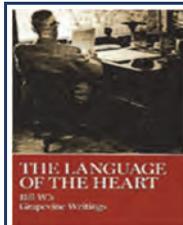


### Soft Back 4th Edition of The Big Book

Item Code 2040

Price £7.00

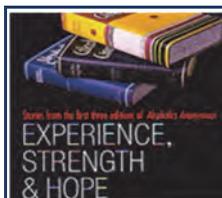
## The Language of the Heart



**The Language of the Heart**  
Bill W's Grapevine writings.

**Item code 2220      Price £7.00**

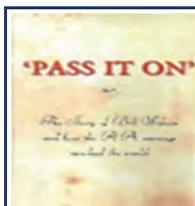
## Experience, Strength & Hope



**Experience, Strength & Hope**  
Stories from the first three editions of Alcoholics Anonymous

**Item Code 2210      Price £7.00**

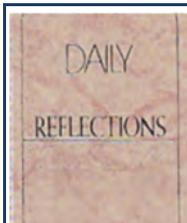
## Pass It On



**Pass It On**  
The Story of Bill Wilson and how the A.A. message reached the world.

**Item Code 2200      Price £8.00**

## Daily Reflections



**Daily Reflections**  
This is a book of reflections by A.A. members for A.A. members.

**Item Code 2260      Price £5.00**

**TO ORDER ANY OF THESE BOOKS PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM BELOW OR SCAN THE QR CODE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PAGE WHICH WILL TAKE YOU DIRECT TO THE ONLINE LITERATURE SHOP**

ITEM	CODE	QUANTITY	PRICE EACH	TOTAL PRICE
AA Comes of Age	2121		6.00	
Dr Bob & the Good Oldtimers	2181		6.00	
Our Great Responsibility	6070		6.00	
As Bill Sees It	2100		5.00	
Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions Pocket Size	2250		5.00	
The Home Group	2230		5.00	
Alcoholics Anonymous Hard Back	2020		8.00	
Alcoholics Anonymous Soft Back	2040		7.00	
Language of the Heart	2220		7.00	
Experience, Strength & Hope	2210		7.00	
Pass It On	2200		8.00	
Daily Reflections	2260		5.00	

**TOTAL PAID** £ \_\_\_\_\_

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***Please send with cheque/PO to General Service Office, PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ***



**Shop | Alcoholics Anonymous - Great Britain**

Using the camera on your smart phone, point the lens at this QR code and it will show you a link to the website.

How to Shop with AA. Use the category links to find the various sections from our literature order form. Use the link and buttons to view the item or to add purchases to your shopping cart.

# A SLIP? MORE LIKE AN AVALANCHE!

**H**ELLO, my name is Carmen and I am an alcoholic. I first came into Alcoholics Anonymous one Sunday of May 1992. I was a mess. My head was scrambled and my life was most certainly unmanageable. It had taken several detoxes, including a detox medication used back then. Hour upon hour of mental health intervention and the suicide of my brother to finally bring me to my knees. There was nowhere else for me to go. All other avenues led to dead ends. Having to face the cold hard fact that my one true and trusted friend, alcohol, was now the cause of ALL of my problems – it was time for us to part company. I was filled with dread, fear, anxiety, resentment and hostility (how dare they tell me to stop drinking!). How would a life without alcohol look? Was it even possible, more importantly could I bear it?

Thankfully the answer was yes, I could. As long as I did a few simple things. Went to meetings. Got a sponsor. Worked through the Steps. Didn't pick up the first drink. Lived life one day at a time. Took on service at my home group. Asked for help and took on the suggestions of other

sober people. Action. Doing all of these things led to more service, having the privilege of taking other ladies through the Steps and staying sober, one day at a time, with ease. My life was transformed. More than that, I was transformed. My thinking had cleared. I was connected to the Fellowship as well as to friends and family outside of the Fellowship. Life had taken on new meaning and all of the promises the Big Book had

*“...every time we are disturbed... there is something wrong with us.”*  
(12&12 p.92)

proclaimed had come true. I was handling situations that baffled me in the past. I was paying my bills on time; I was a good mother, a good wife. I had even made up with my mother (that was huge). So, what happened that led to me, Mrs AA, picking up a drink some seventeen years after entering AA? Three deeply painful things happened in my family over the course of a week in March of 2008, followed by a nasty court case. For some reason, I failed to discuss any of this with my sponsor or friends. Afraid that I'd be told I wasn't working the Steps properly. How could I be if I was feeling so bad? Gradually my thinking began to change. I would judge people in meetings, started to let go of

commitments, dropping meetings until finally meetings were a thing of the past. I didn't pick up straight away. Oh no, I had some therapy to talk through all of the things that happened the previous year. At the end of the therapy, the therapist and I decided that I had gotten through all of these painful situations without once thinking of picking up a drink. Maybe, I wasn't an alcoholic after all! It was now two years since I had been to a meeting. Unbeknown to me (but clear to those around me) I was a dry drunk. Life sucks, I'm stressed and everybody's putting demands on me. I need something for myself. I need some relief from these chattering voices in my head. I reached out. I reached out to an old friend, alcohol. It gave me the release I sought. For but the briefest of moments. I need to stress here – it having been so long since I took my last drink, I had completely forgotten the phenomenon of craving. Yet it was as strong as it had ever been. My desire for alcohol was once again ferocious.

*“...to grow in understanding and effectiveness.”*

(BB p.84)

In my ignorance I had believed it would be easy to put the drink back down. It was anything but easy. I hit many new YETS, along with fresh guilt, shame and remorse. It took me two years – two years! – before I was able to stop drinking. I have now been back in the Rooms for just shy of nine years. I am one of the lucky ones. I made it out of hell for the second time. So many don't. Today I keep it simple. I have to. I lost the privilege to drink alcohol. Once I start, I just can't stop. I don't need reminding of this fact. Thankfully today I am back in the solution and intend, one day at a time, to stay. My best wishes go out to all AA members, new and old, living the life beyond their wildest dreams and those struggling. For me communicating with others, helping newcomers and reaching out to older members has been of great benefit. We need one another. I tried going it alone and ended up right back in the pit of self. A place I work hard to avoid today.

May the God of your understanding bless you.

*CARMEN B, Bournemouth*



**SHARE is now available online on the AA Website.**

The link is: <https://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Fellowship-Magazines/SHARE-Magazine>

You can then go to the relevant month and find the link to download that month's magazine – **Our Meeting Between Meetings** – needed now more than ever!

# GET 'INTO' AA

**M**Y quiet thoughts this morning became musings on the morning of 17-6-87, when a very scared, ashamed, and in utter despair (thank God) woman made a decision that drink must go, having not listened (it didn't apply to me, being different) for 18 drinking months in AA Rooms. I asked for help and it was the first day I was willing to do anything rather than drink. Convinced that from now on I'd be miserable in a dark, awful world, that day my dreadful imaginings were better than picking up a drink. "Get INTO AA", they'd said. "Ask questions", they'd said. "Share early and listen for the feedback," they'd said, "even if afterwards you think, 'I'm glad I'm not like that!'". Then a local-living, American lady – very dainty and smart – would bark, "Don't drink even if your arse falls off.". Most irritating of all was being incessantly told to change my listening!

Now these things the members had said and done were what I needed to do. Then as time passed, a day at a time, me still scared and lacking in confidence, they (en masse) began to tell me to be willing to say yes to service. What a blessing that has been. Outside in work, family, etc, I coped better having learned so much through service, and still do. An ol' timer would often say, "There's no lid on recovery, it just keeps getting better.". Another would call out to us as we left a

meeting, "Get out there and enjoy your sobriety, that's what you've got it for."

This morning with memories flooding back, I am so grateful and in awe that I lived long enough to start this journey of change and recovery, sometimes painful, but always extraordinary – it gives me so much. Then, well, there was Sue, little Sue, younger than me, with a huge heart, and a very honest, very straightforward tongue, (teehee, I can laugh now!). She stuck with me through those first confused ten years, as my sponsor, until she died of leukaemia. The Steps, Traditions, she took me through, as it showed me a different way to live, learn and behave, which with her included being sponsored into Twelve Step work, and so much more, as I re discovered myself, I, and learned how to give it away to keep it. All done within our wonderful Fellowship and my HP. I can't (and don't want to) do this alone. To 'Live Life on Life's terms!' with my head? No thanks! With AA's 'toolbox' and all of you, I'm now a part of! Wow!

As one who got so she thought she couldn't face life (though the reality was face herself) without a drink, 33 years of incredible life and learning have happened, One Day at a Time, so I'm up for more please, as It is Getting Better and I've found the 'It' means me! Love in Fellowship,

*ANN M, Torbay*

# LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

**M**Y name is Jim N. I am an alcoholic. By a power greater than myself, that I choose to call God, the Programme of AA and the people that are in AA, I have not needed to drink since 18/12/1964. Yes, that is 55 years and six months as I write this article. I am neither complacent, nor big-headed about that statement. I drank for 15 years (five years social drinking, five years heavy drinking and five years alcoholic drinking). Having said that, with the knowledge I have acquired since my early days, I realise that I was an alcoholic from the word 'go' – that was just the way my alcoholism worked out. I do not want to give a drunkalogue, enough to say I started with shandy, then on to beer, Scotch then gin. Gin was my tippie. But like most of the people I have heard, I would drink whatever was available if no gin was available. I met my wife Helen when I was seventeen, Helen was sixteen. We married at twenty-two and twenty-one. I could not have had a better wife. We had three daughters and one son together. My wife passed away three years and nine months ago, three months shy of our sixty-year anniversary. That was the

worst thing that has happened to me. Drink did not even enter my mind.

In 1960 I was advised by a new doctor who was taking over my GP practice that there was an organisation starting in Dumbarton (my area) called AA; that was in June 1960. I went to that first meeting and a few afterwards. I was twenty-six years of age and did not want to be

*“Love and tolerance of others is our code.”*

there. In December 1964 I came back to AA where there were two men who were sober and one woman.

From that December day to this very day I have never found a reason not to be in AA. Very early on I became a front runner, not because of my attributions, but because I was, and still am, willing. I had to go to my own group in Dumbarton, then Glasgow (West Nile Street), as at that time AA was very thin on the ground. I came through the service structure – group positions, Glasgow Intergroup, Scottish Committee. I never regretted one day of my sobriety. I have met up with AA in America, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, many parts of Europe, England and all over Scotland.

My wife and I were so fortunate to have travelled the world, we loved cruising. Six months after my wife passed away, I had a heart attack, requiring the insertion of three stents. I also had a relapse of my condition some time later, sorted out again by the wonderful NHS after a five day stay in hospital. Fortunately, I have been keeping well since.

At this time in my life, eighty-six years of age, I am so fortunate to still be able to travel to Spain,

Malta, the Canaries and the UK to attend conventions. I have met so many wonderful people.

These last few months have been the longest time I have ever been away from meetings, but I have my phone and my Big Book. Though I have been isolated these past 14 weeks there is light at the end of the tunnel. Before long, God willing, we should start to see that light and get back to some sense of normality.

*JIM N, Alexandria Scotland*

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## I FOUND HOPE

LET me start by telling you what it was like for me – if there is a stereotypical alcoholic, it wasn't me. I was highly functioning (from an outside point of view), managing to work and have two young children. I didn't lose my house, my job, my husband and not even my driving licence. But by the time I stopped drinking I was drinking every day and was fully dependant on alcohol and my health had started to suffer.

My drinking didn't become a problem until my early forties – up until then I drank within, mostly, safe limits. I even was abstinent from alcohol during both of my pregnancies. However, I believe I was born an alcoholic and that the rampant alcoholism, for want of a better term, lay dormant in me until it was triggered during a

rough time in my life. The rough time in my life didn't make me an alcoholic, I know lots of people who go through rough times and don't become alcoholics.

At the time my drinking was bad, I presented to the GP with depression, anxiety and overwhelming dread. I didn't make an appointment to talk about my drinking. Once, during a consultation, a GP told me to stop drinking because the antidepressants I was on wouldn't work whilst I was drinking. Even though that made sense I couldn't see how that was possible. Every time I stopped drinking, I felt awful. And every time I cut down it crept back up. But I was aware that my drinking wasn't normal. I was really good at hiding it and no one at work suspected (they were shocked when I admitted, years

later, that I was an alcoholic). Without any formal referral I attended local drug and alcohol services, but I felt that most of the people that dealt with me didn't understand me as they weren't alcoholics themselves. One worker did tell me about AA and I was willing to try anything. That worker WAS an alcoholic in recovery, which probably made me trust her more.

It wasn't long before my drinking had affected my health to the extent that I was hospitalised, and after a week in hospital and a detox, I started to attend AA. What an alcoholic wants more than anything (apart from the ability to drink without consequence!) is hope. Hope that it doesn't have to be like this the whole time. Hope that life can be lived without alcohol, not with whitened knuckles and gritted teeth, but

happily. That's what I got from my first, and subsequent AA meetings, one alcoholic talking to another. People were there telling my story, even the embarrassing bits, which I found scary and liberating in equal measure. No one told me what to do, suggestions were made and eventually I did what was required. I got a sponsor and worked the Twelve Steps. I still don't know how it works! But my husband, and others, say that since going to AA I have been the calmest they have ever known me.

Are alcoholics wired differently? I think so. No-one can help an alcoholic if they don't want help. But no-one has to suffer the consequences of their alcoholism without help. AA has given me a second chance – and for that I will always be grateful.

LISA

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## FRIEND TO FOE

**M**Y name is Jo and I'm an alcoholic. Right now, I'm nine years and five months sober, I just worked that out on my fingers and kind of realised how I've taken my sobriety for granted. The first couple of years of trying to be sober when I realised that I needed to change, was like a life in limbo and it's not a good space to be in. I would try with all my might to stop drinking and let myself down time and time again as I would cave in and down that

drink and enjoy that release that in the end would last a few minutes. I can now see how as soon as I had that taste, the next step was to drink to feel drunk and be thinking about the next drink as this drink was going down too quickly – like a kind of panic to get the next drink in me.

Thank God it is different for me today. It was like being spun around 'til dizzy, not knowing what direction I would be heading in the next moment and how drunk and

ill I would be. I had no control over what I would do, go, say or end up which would always result in an anxiety-filled morning the next day. Remorse and depression would hit hard as the fun had finally stopped in my drinking times. I had to have a few rock bottoms and anxiety, panic-stricken, sad, guilty and destructive episodes until it got bad enough. I can remember my last drink and it affected me so badly that my body completely rejected it like it would if poisoned. I think that low point for it was in that moment something broke and would change my life forever.

*“We are neither  
cocky nor are we  
afraid.” (BB p.85)*

So, I always see any bad time in my life now as an opportunity to grow and know that something good shall come from this although I don't see it at the time. My sobriety journey has been wonderful and

I'm truly blessed to have experienced all that I have. God-given gifts that I treasure forever. Peace in my life and courage to follow my heart and know that I am always on the right path regardless of how confusing and wrong it may feel at times. May you be truly blessed in all you do and to fulfil your life in ways beyond your wildest dreams – one day at a time.

*JO, Sutton, Surrey*

# CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19)

**Alcoholics Anonymous UK is constantly updating  
information on our AA UK Website**

[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Coronavirus-News](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/Members/Coronavirus-News)

This includes:

General guidance about Covid19

Help and guidance about  
On-Line meetings

Links to On-Line AA meetings

Link to update meeting details

Guidance about On-Line  
Anonymity

Links to Share and Roundabout  
On-Line

Help for Newcomers

Tradition Seven

Literature orders

Other websites claiming to be  
connected to AA

GSO requests that we avoid calling the London, York or Glasgow office for general enquiries but rather email to: [gso@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](mailto:gso@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

# GRATITUDE

I'VE been meaning to do this for a long time now... I've finally decided to do a gratitude list for the first time in ages. This might help me get straight out of bed in the mornings!

A bit of context here. It's my best (from my previous life) friend's fortieth today and I texted him the other day to see if he had any plans. His reply was, "No plans – just slipping into my forties, on the dole and unsure about the future for the first time in my life." It made me really sad to read that and I'm going to speak to him today. I may possibly tell him some uncomfortable truths as that worked with me – although I'm unsure at the moment. On another note, I had a nasty accident with a screwdriver and the palm of my left hand a few weeks ago which left me needing surgery. The stitches haven't quite yet healed and at worst I may lose a bit of feeling in one of my fingers but on the whole it's healing very well. So, in no particular order, this is what I'm grateful for today!

My left hand – I'm grateful and appreciate having a bath or a shower unaided, making a sandwich, climbing over a fence, taking the dog out, typing on a keyboard and scratching my back! I'm grateful that I live in a country (for all its sins) that allowed me to have my hand operated on and repaired within a week, I'm grateful

to the NHS for saving my life ten years ago when I had head surgery. Indeed, just to be able bodied – I worked in a supported-living home before I got sober and it was such an eye opener. My family, we took the dog out yesterday and for a few brief seconds I looked in front of me and saw my two beautiful boys, my wife (yes, I know I still need to actually propose) and the dog and felt genuine happiness and awe. They are happy, healthy – they love me and I love them with all my heart. It's amazing when I stop to think about it, it really is. I'm grateful my mum is proud of her son, I'm grateful she doesn't lie awake at night worried sick about me anymore.

I'm grateful of course to AA, what it's given me goes way beyond the financial and material of which there has been so much. Thanks to AA I was able to make peace, forgive my Dad and make a relationship with him before he died. I often think about that time in my life and look back with pleasure at the way AA taught me to handle life with a bit more dignity – a bit more class. I don't have any guilt or regrets. Similarly, and although not completely guilt or regret free, by going through the Steps properly I don't carry much, if any, hate in my heart towards anyone and there were some deep resentments on that list for sure. My sponsor who has

and continues to be a big part of my life. My good friends that I've met in AA. I'm grateful today to have direction and purpose in my life – I have goals and dreams and I work towards them; I work towards them for me and personal accomplishment. I've learnt much more about who I am and I'm comfortable and accepting of that. AA has given me that perspective, so I can recognise when I'm heading off track – and I now have the tools to work towards alignment. I have a job that I really enjoy – and in this climate and in my industry I'm lucky to have a job at all.

The dog woke me up at 3am this morning, I couldn't get back to sleep and as I lay there listening to the birds start to wake up it reminded me of how wonderful it is to be waking up at that time rather than getting home. I am grateful to my Higher Power – but I have to say I still question why the world is in such trouble yet I'm kept sober and protected. Still a work in progress clearly! There's so much more but you get the point. Finally, I'm grateful that my desire to stay sober is as strong today as it was when I first came to AA. Thanks

*CHRIS T, Essex*

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# A PECULIAR MENTAL TWIST

**W**HEN I came into AA, I had acknowledged the fact that I had a drink problem, one that I needed to do something about. It had been bothering me for some time or, to be more precise, the consequences of my drinking had been bothering me for some time – but when I finally made a decision to stop, I found that I couldn't. I managed a few days, then drove past my favorite pub on the way home one day, and the inevitable happened. It was as if the car had a mind of its own when it pulled into the pub car park. When I did get home, not long after, that was when I realised I could not

stop drinking. I had made a firm decision to quit, and I had meant it – yet here I was drinking heavily and unable to explain why, not even to myself.

I rang the AA helpline that day. Someone rang me back within half an hour, and I went to my first meeting the following evening. For quite a while, as I began to settle into the Fellowship, I thought that, since I had a problem with alcohol, if I stopped drinking then the problem would be solved. A natural enough attitude perhaps, and understandable at that stage, but nevertheless a serious misdiagnosis of what was really wrong with me.

Step Twelve does not say “Having stopped drinking alcohol as the result of these steps...” Instead it says, “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps...” So, what on earth is a ‘spiritual awakening’, and why do I need one?

The Doctor’s Opinion has this to say about the illness of alcoholism:

*“We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that 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. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all...”* (BB p.xxviii). So far so good. I had come to that conclusion myself before I ever contacted AA, although I probably would not have used those precise words. I cannot drink at all because I always end up drinking more than I intended. *“The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence.”* (BB p.xxx). An allergy is simply an abnormal reaction – I cannot drink like normal drinkers; I cannot take it or leave it alone. The answer to my allergy to alcohol is entire abstinence – just as it would be for someone who is allergic to nuts or seafood or whatever. Just don’t touch it. So then, if the solution to the allergic reaction is entire abstinence, where do the Twelve Steps come in? What do I need this ‘spiritual awakening’ for, whatever it might be?

The answer is because the allergy is only half of the disease of alcoholism. I also suffer from

*“We are not cured of alcoholism.”*

(BB p.85)

an obsession that I will one day, somehow, be able to drink and get away with it – despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. *“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 of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body.”* (BB p.23). Here’s the real problem – there will always and inevitably be times when I will either forget that I can’t drink safely, or I will believe that I will be alright this time, and I will begin drinking all over again, the end result being insanity or death, and a very horrible journey along the way. This is what the Big Book goes to considerable lengths to describe as a ‘strange mental blank spot.’ As the Doctor’s Opinion puts it, *“...they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false.”* (BB p.xxviii).

The closing paragraph from the chapter ‘More About Alcoholism’, tells me that *“The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink.”* (BB p.43). It does not say “the still-drinking alcoholic”, it says, “The alcoholic...” – and that means me, even with some years of sobriety behind me. Do I know when these ‘certain times’ might occur? No – although I might like to think I do. What then am I to do to survive? *“His defense must come from a Higher Power.”* (BB p.43). That’s why I need a spiritual awakening.

STEVEN, Buxton

# THE CLOAK OF MY PAST

**M**Y name's Bill and I'm an alcoholic. Good morning everyone. My sobriety date is October 6th 1997. My home group is Hanham Hall. Wednesday meeting. Bristol. UK. On my first day of sobriety, whilst being Twelfth-Stepped, I was told that all my life I'd been wearing a cloak of my past.

The cloak fitted me very well. I felt comfortable and at home with it on my shoulders. It was a cloak I'd come to know intimately. It was my friend. It was my saviour; it was my other half. It contained the thoughts, the deeds, the emotions of my past. And it was a cloak that AA, the Steps etc. would hopefully remove one day. My old faithful cloak contained things I would find difficult to live without. Those things were resentments, fear, anger, low self-worth, intolerance, people-pleasing, deep-seated guilt, feelings of special and difference, an aloneness, self-pity, desire to retaliate, multiple personalities, the ability to gravitate towards the negative and a total bewilderment as to what life was all about.

It was explained to me that if I stuck around AA, the process of a spiritual recovery was, in essence, to gradually, slowly and steadily, remove the old cloak and replace it with a new one. But that is where the problems started. Taking off my old faithful friend was

difficult, painful and at times very frightening. I felt safe and secure with it on. My new cloak that AA offered me contained things that I would find strange, frightening, different, unacceptable, intimidating and even grotesque. For this new cloak contained things like hope, love, tolerance, gratitude, faith, warmth, happiness, laughter, compassion, a vision for the future and of course truth. I thought then, that the old cloak was an easier fit. But in my 22 years of sobriety, removing the old cloak has been a long, difficult and often painful journey. But putting on the new one has been an even more demanding, frightening and lonely path to follow. At times of pain, it's easier to wear the old cloak. It's where I feel at home. But my Programme, my Twelve Steps, my spiritual journey says I must not stop moving forward – don't stop the process of change. Keep moving towards a life of inspiration and change. The days I most want to wear the old cloak, those are the days I most need to try the new cloak out. For it's when I'm feeling weak I've got to be strong. When I'm feeling strong, I can afford to be weak. But when I'm weak I can't afford to be weak; I've got to be strong. Keep on striving to change your cloak in recovery. And never give up until the miracle of a changed life happens.

*BILL THE SHIRT, Bristol, UK*



# A year's worth of AA inspiration, one day at a time

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# SHARE INTERVIEW

## WITH GARY F FIVE YEARS SOBER



Interview conducted via telephone by Ian

**Q** What first brought you to the Fellowship?

**A** I was directed by a rehab. Part of the aftercare was continuing with AA meetings, I'd also got nowhere else to go. My whole life had been falling apart and I was losing one thing after another. But I didn't use the tools that I'd been given and then went on the drink for a further two years. Everything happened in those two years – bankruptcy, unemployment, collapse of family contacts, a relationship broke down, loss of driving licence, a suicide attempt in April 2014 followed by an overdose in June of that year. I was on a life support system for ten days and was subsequently taken to a different rehab when I came off the life support.

**Q** How old were you when you took your first drink?

**A** Thirteen/fourteen years of age. I was drinking cans, just getting a buzz off it.

**Q** When do you think that a problem started to develop?

**A** With hindsight, I would say about the age of twenty-eight/twenty-nine. My world had started falling apart. Job taken away, my wife filed for divorce and that's when I went to work in the Middle East. I wanted to earn some tax-free money and to try and get my life back in order.

**Q** I know you do service in AA. What do you see as the benefits and have you found any challenges?

**A** I've absolutely embraced service. At first it was intrigue – how does AA work? I was mesmerised, there were no bosses, no government rules or regulations. The first available opportunity, I got in there. In my early days washing cups and mingling with people away from the main meeting was great. I think the best service I had was tea and coffee boy

at intergroup, I met so many people. I was just talking to someone earlier and realised that I had simultaneously two different service positions – birthday secretary and treasurer. But I also realised that to learn to be a secretary, I shouldn't do that until I had a knowledge of other positions. I made it quite clear in my own head that I couldn't be a head chef until I'd been a trainee chef and then a sub chef and a second chef – I needed to know all the things. I was volunteered for the position of GSR. This year the local convention committee have asked me to become treasurer. When I started working I had to reduce the amount I was doing in AA and get a balance – that was quite hard.

**Q** So Gary, have you been through the Twelve Steps?

**A** I've been through them once properly with my sponsor – I've been with him for about four years. Now, looking at my sponsees – I've taken two through the Twelve Steps. I'll just add that rather than have a lot of sponsees I'd rather just have a couple and do a good, thorough job with them. Seeing someone who's really desperate get well, have a family life and is working is brilliant, it's just unbelievable.

**Q** This virus, how are getting on with your sobriety in the current situation of lockdown?

**A** I'm so calm about it – one day at a time. I'm powerless over what I'm told to do. I'm happy with what I've got. Everything I'd accumulated from the ages of thirty to fifty-four went as a result of my drinking. Finances, status, and yet today I've got what I want. I don't want for anything. I'm very grateful. I think I'm coping with it very well. I can support people over the phone to the best of my ability.

**Q** What would you say to any newcomers reading this?

**A** I tried everything before I came to AA. Rehabilitations, drink reduction programmes, several detoxes. My medication has been AA. Nothing else has worked for me. Technically I should be dead – I didn't think there was a solution. Now I'm told about those words in the Big Book: 'There is a Solution.'

**Thank you, Gary, that's a powerful way to end.**



# shareback

If you have identified with anything in SHARE, or wish to express a personal opinion based on your experience, share it with us. Write a letter of not more than 300 words and enclosing a contact name and address (not for publication) to:

**Share Back, PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ.**  
or **E Mail [AAShare@gsogb.org.uk](mailto:AAShare@gsogb.org.uk)**

## ACCEPTANCE REMAINS THE KEY

I THOUGHT I would share about my experience, strength and hope during this present lockdown. I was in the last physical AA meeting in our area with chairs two metres apart, no tea or coffee and no physical hugs. I am not very techy but must thank all the alcoholics who so rapidly started online meetings. At first, I was anxious about getting into meetings, had huge fear about something called bombing but what a joy to see my fellow alcoholics on screen. What a joy to once again be saying The Serenity Prayer together.

Then I was asked to do a main share online. Realising that honesty, open-mindedness and willingness are key to our recovery, I said yes. I was a little anxious about it (honestly). My mind had opened to the fact of online meetings and I was willing to carry the message and needless to say it was fine and made me feel more connected. One of the things that has given me the most hope at this time is hearing newcomers of ten days or two days sober, only experiencing online meetings but getting phone numbers and the support we all need to stay sober.

I have also been aware that some of my Fellows have not accessed the online meetings. I have tried to provide the information they need but SHARE magazines and the old-fashioned telephone have been a godsend. Thank you, AA, that our primary purpose continues to be fulfilled. That the Twelve Step Programme of recovery works in all circumstances and we are lucky indeed that we already live our life one day at a time. Some of my Fellows have so much grief in their lives right now but are able to share their pain and also share that they do not want to and do not need to drink.

I pray that we will be able to meet again soon but, in the meantime, I continue to meet life on life's terms. Acceptance remains the key.

NICKY, Gloucester

## THE KEY IS WILLINGNESS

*DURING my drinking, my life was run on self-will, pride, resentment, fear, blame and masses of self-pity. I ran the show however badly until I arrived at the doors of AA. I still ran the show until I realised that I wanted*

*what you had – sobriety and peace of mind, occasional joy and faith in the Twelve Step Programme of recovery. The reading (Daily Reflections, March 7th) talks about willingness being the key to allowing my Higher Power to enter and take control over any problem. It reminds me of, “...the result was nil until we let go absolutely.” (BB p.58).*

*In my experience if I have part of me still trying to conquer a situation on my own strength it doesn't work too well. I have to surrender to win and then I have peace of mind because I admit my powerlessness and ask for help. It sounds so straight forward, and it is, but in the present times I have needed and continue to need to accept situations I didn't expect and a future none of us can see right now. I am willing to believe in what I know to be true – to live one day at a time, that I can change no one but myself. I am not in charge. I am grateful for my life and my recovery. And that I will always be one drink away from drunk and that I need to be willing to go to any length to stay sober.*

NICKY

## **EGO DEFLATION**

MY name is Ray. I'm an alcoholic. A true tale of ego deflation based on my personal experience in recovery. A few years into recovery I started looking to do service in my local AA area, including making the tea, group secretary, GSR, treasurer, share finder etc. I then gratefully took on the role of Telephone Liaison for our local intergroup. I found this service to be very rewarding in the spirit of our Fifth Tradition. I had a regular responder duty slot – every Monday night from 10.30pm through until 8.00am Tuesday morning. I was regularly reminded of the pain

newcomers often experience and the importance of carrying the message via the Twelfth-Stepping network.

One particular Monday evening I was asked to share my experience, strength and hope at a local meeting. I duly shared, and then drove home, logged on to the telephone service and went to bed. The phone rang around midnight, it was a lady who sounded upset. She had tried AA for a few months and had a drink that night. I spoke with the lady, encouraged her to keep coming back to AA, and asked her if she was going to meetings? “Yes.” she said, “In fact I went to a meeting this evening actually” (the meeting I'd shared at!). So calmly I asked the lady if she'd got anything out of the meeting? “Not really.” she said, “The man who shared was boring and kept repeating himself.”. If I'm honest I felt a little put out by her comments, after all, I'd not had a drink one day at a time for a few years by then and was giving up my free time to answer her call to the AA helpline. I'm so glad I didn't explain that it was me who shared that evening, and importantly the lady accepted my offer to arrange a female Twelfth-Step call the following day.

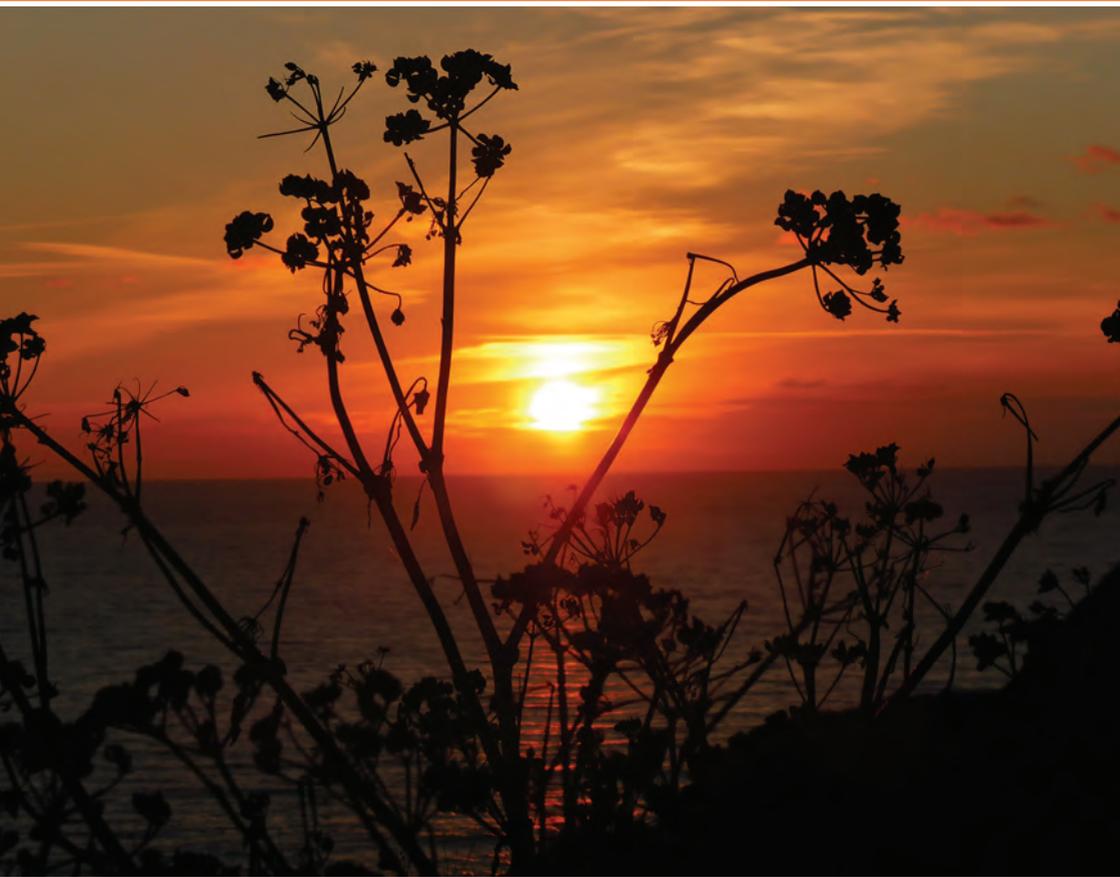
When I told my sponsor what happened, he nearly choked on his coffee. He had regularly reminded me, quite rightly, of the negative impact of an untreated inflated ego!! I'm grateful to our wonderful Fellowship and the Twelve Step Recovery Programme, for helping me stay sober one day at a time, and to be reminded daily that I need to stay humble and keep that ego deflated.

RAY H.

# THE TWELVE CONCEPTS

## for World Service

1. Final responsibility and ultimate authority for AA world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.
2. The General Service Conference of AA has become, for nearly every practical purpose, the active voice and the effective conscience of our whole Society in its world affairs.
3. To ensure effective leadership, we should endow each element of AA – the Conference, the General Service Board and its service corporations, staffs, committees and executives – with a traditional ‘Right of Decision’.
4. At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional ‘Right of Participation’, allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.
5. Throughout our structure, a traditional ‘Right of Appeal’ ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.
6. The Conference recognise that the chief initiative and active responsibility in most world service matters should be exercised by the trustee members of the Conference acting as the General Service Board.
7. The Charter and Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, empowering the trustees to manage and conduct world service affairs. The Conference Charter is not a legal document; it relies upon tradition and the AA purse for final effectiveness.
8. The trustees are the principal planners and administrators of over-all policy and finance. They have custodial oversight of the separately incorporated and constantly active services, exercising this through their ability to elect all the directors of these entities.
9. Good service leadership at all levels is indispensable for our future functioning and safety. Primary world service leadership, once exercised by the founders, must necessarily be assumed by the trustees.
10. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined.
11. The trustees should always have the best possible committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs and consultants. Composition, qualifications, induction procedures, and rights and duties will always be matters of serious concern.
12. The Conference shall observe the spirit of AA tradition, taking care that it never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle; that it place none of its members in a position of unqualified authority over others; that it reach all important decisions by discussion, vote, and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that its actions never be personally punitive nor an incitement to public controversy; that it never performs acts of government and that, like the Society it serves, it will always remain democratic in thought and action.



God grant me the **SERENITY**  
to **ACCEPT** the things  
I cannot change  
**COURAGE** to change the things  
I can and **WISDOM** to  
know the difference