

2nd Reader for Alcoholics Anonymous

YOU HAVE BEEN a member of Alcoholics Anonymous for several weeks, Or is it several months? The bright, shining newness has started to dull just a little. The first glamorous flush of sobriety has started to wear off. There is, you know, a lot of glamour connected with the first weeks in AA. You have been the center of attention. Scores of new friends have gone out of their way to be nice to you. There has been glamour to walking down the street with head held high, eyes sparkling. There is glamour to the feeling that for the first time in years you have the respect of others, self respect. Vanished are the days of ducking into alleys to avoid people, letting the telephone go unanswered, hiding when the doorbell rings. You get a thrill at such small things as being able to pick up a full glass of water without slopping it.

But this initial enthusiasm, alas, is too soon gone. You are no longer the glamour child of your group. You are accepted as a matter of course.

Newly found sobriety runs almost as true to pattern as does drinking. You will recall the progress of your drinking: a social nip with an occasional one-night bender; the social drinks multiplying with the benders coming closer together; the first morning pick-me up; then the before-breakfast half pint; the sudden discovery that you could not stop drinking; home troubles, job troubles, stealing, pawning; and finally -- the hospital or skid row.

The sobriety pattern starts with bewilderment when the program is first explained. It all seems so complicated, particularly to an alcohol-fogged brain, as to be impossible. Then comes the complete surprise that by following the Twenty Four Hour Plan, and with the assistance of others, you, too, can stay sober. The complexities of the program fall into a pattern and become a simple picture. This is invariably followed by a burning enthusiasm, a zeal to share your newfound happiness with others and a crusading spirit to dry up the world. So you try to sober up every drunk you can find, only to be first surprised and then disappointed that a great number of folks don't want to give up drinking. You may lend money lavishly and when it is not repaid you're hurt to find there are chiselers in AA as well as anywhere else. About this time a succession of your babies suffer relapses and you become discouraged. Discouragement becomes so black that you consider following in the path of your erring babies. But you will soon snap out of it and go on to another phase. Along about now you are certain that you know more about AA than anyone in the world. You can't understand how Joe Smith manages to keep sober when his method of following the program is different from yours. Perhaps you will even take the matter up with Joe and you are a little put out when he shrugs off your advice and goes on his merry way -- still sober. You find fault with the management of meeting and with their speakers. To prove your point you take over the chairmanship -- only to find that the meetings are about the

same as before, speakers politely disregard your suggestions, and that prod as you may, there are but a select few you can count on to take over the small chores connected with the group's operation.

It is hardly a smooth path, but it is a normal one, and your little tribulations are adding to your stature, although unknown to yourself. It is all part of the education of an Alcoholic Anonymous.

Somewhere along the line we come face to face with an all important question:

WHAT IS THERE IN AA FOR ME BEYOND PLAIN SOBRIETY?

Up to this time your sobriety has kept rolling along on a purely physical basis. You have kept active. You have attended meetings; you have held long discussions with your friends; you have eagerly done Twelfth Step work, carrying the program to others. If you haven't been able to fully comprehend the Spiritual part of the program, so what? You put a little more steam into your Twelfth Step work and the momentum has kept you sober.

This pamphlet, therefore, attempts to take up where the initial enthusiasm starts to cool down. It attempts, in a measure, to answer that very important question, **WHAT IS THERE IN AA FOR ME BESIDES SOBRIETY.**

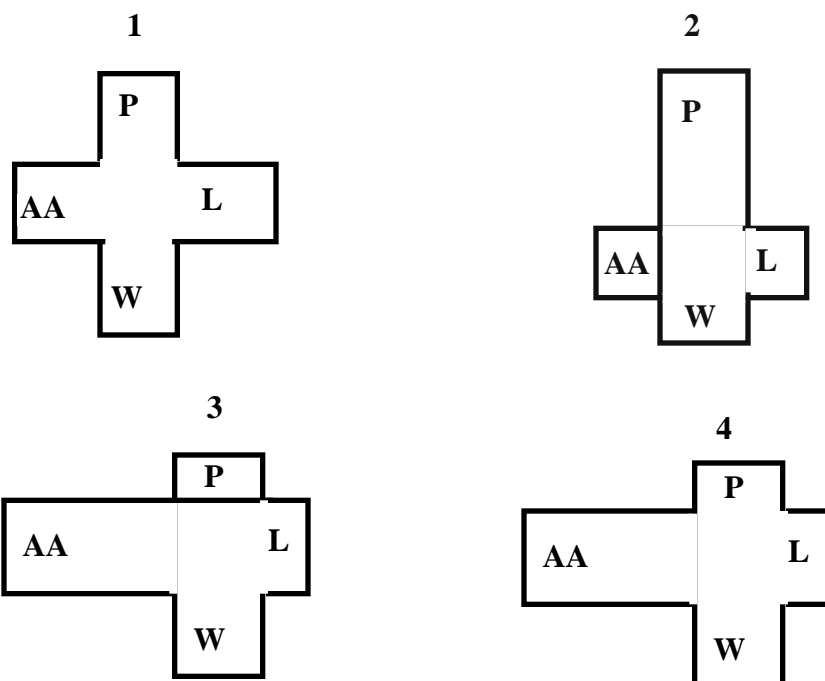
I

THE CHIEF AIM of mankind is to move toward a fullness of life. There is a school of philosophy that believes a fully rounded life is divided into four classifications, all of them being equal:

WORK, PLAY, LOVE and RELIGION.

Translating into terms of the alcoholic, we substitute **ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS for RELIGION.**

The following figures make this easier to understand and trace the progress of an alcoholic to a normal life.



P-Play, L-Love, W-Work, AA-Alcoholics Anonymous

FIGURE 1: A normal life. Each arm of the cross is equal, as should be Love, Work, Play and AA in a well balanced program for living.

FIGURE 2: The abnormal pattern of our drinking days. Play dominates at the almost complete expense of everything else. Love is at a bare minimum, and has become almost extinct. We have a certain amount of affection for our dear ones, but our love for alcohol is far greater. Work is at a minimum. We work simply to assure ourselves of money to buy liquor. And Religion, later to be replaced by AA, is entirely out of the picture, as indicated by the dotted lines. (note dotted lines are boxes in this version)

FIGURE 3: We have newly come into AA, and the design of the cross has changed completely. Where Play dominated Figure 2, it is now replaced by a faint shadow (dotted lines). Where Religion, or now AA, was completely lacking in Figure 2, it is now completely dominant. We are so serious in our pursuit of sobriety that we have lost much of our sense of humor, and certainly our sense of Play. Healthy recreations have not yet replaced our carousing. Work is slightly on the exaggerated side. We are working to extreme to please boss, customer or client. Love has improved. We are, however, so occupied with AA that we are still neglecting our families. There is no need to fret about this, however, because our dear ones are so grateful for our sobriety they will not complain of a little neglect.

FIGURE 4: The initial excitement of AA has worn off and we are fast returning to normal. Work and Love are completely in line. Boss, customer and client have been duly impressed by our sincerity and we are again doing our job the way it should be done. We are finding a little more time for our loved ones. And we have made the discovery that life in AA is not as serious as we thought. We again enjoy fishing, hunting, the theater, dances (without bottled energy) outings to the country, gardening, and long forgotten hobbies. AA still is the dominant factor, but Play is finally getting some attention. And that brings us back eventually to

FIGURE 1: Where we are enjoying a well rounded life off Love, Work, Play and Religion (or AA).

The journey from Figure 3 through Figure 4 and back to Figure 1 does not mean neglecting AA or our 12th Step work. Simply, as we grow older in the group we learn to budget our time more efficiently. We learn to avoid lost motion as time passes. We have discovered that the entire world does not want to give up drinking, and we spend less time butting our heads against the stone wall of resistance. We are still doing the same amount of good for others and for ourselves, but it requires but a fraction of the time we spent when we first found AA. This extra time we devote to building up the other factors that make up a normal life.

II

NOW THAT THE INITIAL glamour of sobriety has worn off, how are we to regulate our lives?

In the first place, a new philosophy, tailored by the individual to meet his own needs, is in order. You admire many of your new friends in the groups. In older centers of AA you may feel you would like to pattern your life after someone who has been sober 10 or 12 years. You may take your sponsor as an example. And at this point it is well to consider the long range of your future. It is more than likely you will find the philosophy, the pattern that suits him best may prove ruinous to you. For, as no two sets of finger prints are alike, neither are any two of us exactly alike as to personality, moral fiber, ambitions, likes and dislikes,

appetites, philosophy or any other of our inner workings.

As a simple illustration, give 20 women the same ingredients to make a cake. They all will use flour, milk, flavoring, shortening, and other necessary ingredients. Yet they will come up with 20 entirely different cakes. And furthermore, all of them are good. So it is in AA. Your sponsor may use the same ingredients as you, only he will be sparing of one, lavish in another, according to his own personal tastes. Yet who is to say that his sobriety is more successful than yours? Any more than Mrs. Smith's chocolate cake with white frosting is better than Mrs. Johnson's white cake with chocolate frosting.

How to form a philosophy and working plan? Start with simple, tested ingredients. Use the Twelve Steps as a basis. Then throw in the Ten Commandments, well mixed with the simple rules for decent living: kindness, patience, tolerance, charity, integrity, fortitude, and all the rest. At meetings you will hear hundreds of suggestions on how sobriety can be obtained and retained. Try them all, and be sure the trial is fair. You will find out soon enough if it fits your own needs or not. If not do not hesitate to discard it. As the years pass you will find yourself throwing out ideas that seemed pretty important when you first discovered them. This is normal, as long as you replace them with equally healthy ideas. Humility is an important part of sobriety, and always remember that humility is simply teachability. Neither in AA nor in life itself do we ever stand still. We either go forward or slip back.

Above all, be patient. The forming of a philosophy to fully suit your needs may take years. At all times remember the AA slogan, "Easy Does It."

III

ALONG THESE LINES, as time passes it will occur to you that since not everyone uses a set formula for sober living, there must be something common to all, a Common Denominator.

Consider your friends, A, B, C, D and E. They all doing a splendid job of sober living. Yet each differs in his major ingredients.

A is introspective, forever examining his soul.

B is a great reader, devouring all the inspirational literature he can find.

C never misses a meeting within traveling distance.

D is a "Group Worker," never happy unless he is getting the speakers, acting as greeter, organizing parties, arranging the refreshments.

E spends three times as many hours as anyone else in the group on 12th Step work. (There are dozens of others but these will suffice as examples)

On the other hand, A does very little 12th Step work; B attends a maximum of one meeting a week; C hardly knows the meaning of the word introspection; D never opens a book; and E ducks Group jobs.

And yet, each is faithful in his sobriety, and each is leading a full life. There must be a Common Denominator. It is simply this:

Every last one of them puts **FIRST THINGS FIRST.**

The FIRST THING in the life of any Alcoholic Anonymous is **SOBRIETY.**

And the sooner we Alcoholics put Sobriety above all else -- including job, home, family and faith -- the sooner we clear the path to satisfying sobriety, the goal for all of us.

IV

HAVING SAID FAREWELL to the whisky bottle we are definitely plagued with a physical desire to drink. How long this desire lasts depends largely upon the physical makeup of the individual. It may last only a few weeks, or it may be prolonged for months. Eventually, and usually in no great length of time, this physical desire leaves us. Why, then, do we hear of so many slips after months and even years of sobriety?

There is no mystery about it. When the physical craving dies, **THE DESIRE TO DRINK IS PURELY MENTAL.** Unfortunately, this mental desire can be as strong as the earlier physical craving. For this mental thirstiness, or false appetite, there can be but one method of relief -- corrective thought. Our thinking must be kept in a straight line. Our mental attitude must undergo a sharp change. We must absolutely forego certain imperfections, certain flaws in our mental processes that are not particularly harmful to non-alcoholics. To us, such things as Hate, Greed, Jealousy, Lust, Dishonesties large and small, Untruthfulness, Temper and Temperament are forbidden "luxuries." These little faults can eventually be disastrous to us. They have a vicious way of growing in stature until we find ourselves reaching for the bottle as a cure-all.

Let's look at an example of what crooked thinking can do.

Henry Jones, an alcoholic, has joined AA and apparently is doing a first rate job of keeping sober. Although his salary is none too large and he is still paying off debts of his drinking days, he lives in a nice neighborhood, and the old Blooper Six, while it was a good car when he bought it five years ago, is getting pretty shabby. One day Henry's nextdoor neighbor, Sam Smith, drives up in a glistening new Blooper Eight. He brags about its speed and comfort and stirs up in Henry's mind a Number One "Luxury" -- Jealousy. Every time he sees his neighbor's new car Henry's jealousy increases. Before long it becomes a major issue. He develops a strong distaste for Sam, a distaste that slowly grows to Hate -- another Forbidden

Luxury. Then comes a series of odd misunderstandings, petty squabbles that would have been laughed off before the automobile episode. The question of who owns the apples on the tree that grows on the property line. Sam plays his radio too loud at night. Mrs. Sam has a luncheon and doesn't invite Mrs. Henry. So one fine day Henry finds himself completely fed up on the whole thing. He'll show 'em. And his only way of "showing 'em" is the old one -- Henry goes out and gets a snootful!

This sounds like exaggeration, but actually slips have been built on far flimsier material.

There is an answer found in the Tenth Step:
"Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it." We can whip imperfect thinking by strict practice of this step. A little simple analysis by Henry on the day Sam brought home the new car would have avoided the whole unfortunate mixup with its nasty consequences. Henry could have said to Sam, in effect: "That's a swell car and I certainly envy you. But I can't afford one right now. Maybe in six months I can trade in the old job." Had he done that simple little thing his trouble never could have started.

Make it a practice upon going to bed every night to review the day and talk things over with yourself. **This applies whether you have been in AA ten days or ten years.** Don't sleep on Greed, Hate, Envy, Self Pity, Resentment or any of the other Forbidden Luxuries. Get them out of your system, even to the extent of talking them over with someone else. AA is made up of understanding folks who are happy to help with your problems.

V

VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING we do in life is a habit. Stand a baby on his feet at three months and he topples over. At a year he toddles, and at two years he runs. Habit! We recite the multiplication table over and over again in school, not because it is a form of torture inflicted by the teacher, but to form a mental habit. Fifty years later you automatically say 42 when someone says Seven times Six. Consider your daily life. You sleep in the same position every night. You settle into routine when you awaken, combing your hair a set way, starting at a certain place on your face when you shave, brushing your teeth in so many strokes. You eat at set intervals. You drive to work over the same route. You retire at a certain hour and require so many hours of sleep. Habit! Obviously we can form good habits as well as bad, sober as well as drunken. It is all a matter of repetition, just like the multiplication table.

Sobriety definitely can become a habit. As a starter, try a brief prayer morning and night. At start of the day ask God (and always as YOU understand Him) to give you a lift for the day; ask help in your problems, and guidance in sobriety. At night before going to sleep thank God for the help he has given, and pray that you may be sober for another twenty-four hours. Try this program for a month and it will become a habit.

Attend a certain meeting every week. Don't permit anything short of sickness or absence from the city to keep you away. Neither heat nor rain nor blizzard kept you away from the corner tavern when you felt the urge for a few quick ones -- usually a nightly urge. Attend a certain meeting for a full year and you will feel something is missing from your life the week you decide to stay home.

Talk over AA affairs with your wife (or husband) every day. Perhaps you got a new idea from last night's leader that would bear further consideration. Talk over the Group's affairs and personalities. Let's see, Don K. hasn't been to a meeting in a month. He'd better get on the ball before someone has to pick him out of a gutter. (At this point **DO SOMETHING** concerning Don K. He may have a problem you can help untangle. Perhaps a simple phone call will get him back at meetings.) . . . And George H. is doing a magnificent job. . . They've asked you to get speakers next month. Now who could you get? And so on. Little things like this may sound trivial, but they all go toward forming the habit of sobriety. Think AA all the time and sobriety will take care of itself.

Volunteer to do chores for the Group. get in the habit of volunteering for any job that may come up. You'll notice that the folks who are most active have the easiest time keeping sober. Offer to pick up the doughnuts, or make the coffee, or be official greeter to new people, or get the speakers, or help straighten up the hall after the meeting.

Keep away from saloons unless it is absolutely necessary to enter them. You don't have to hang around taverns to prove you have will power. The soldier who stands on top of a trench and challenges the enemy to shoot at him is neither brave nor a hero. He is just a plain damn fool. An AA who needlessly hangs around a beer parlor is just tempting fate. There is still a fascination in those glistening bottles on the back bar. A frosty glass of beer still looks mighty comforting on a hot day. But why torture yourself needlessly?

Do a job of sales promotion in yourself. Sell yourself the idea that while liquor may be all right for those who can handle it, it is strictly poison as far as you are concerned. Check the benefits of sobriety just as you would check the qualities of a new car you are trying to sell. Try working out a chart:

	Before AA	After AA
Personal appearance		
General health		
Mental health		
Frame of mind		
Family relations		
Finances		

You can make your own additions to this list. Then honestly fill in the

answers in the right hand columns. Get your wife to help you. You may be amazed with the results.

Sobriety definitely can become a habit, but don't expect miracles. It is a long haul proposition, but we can make a little progress every day.

VI

WE ARE TOLD from the very beginning that AA is a Spiritual program, but many of us are perplexed by the meaning of the word. There **IS NO MYSTERY** in the Spiritual side of AA. As a matter of fact, the good active member is practicing Christianity at all times whether or not he knows it.

The Spiritual program of AA is not one of stained glass windows, high alters, candles, choir, crucifix, clergyman in robes or his Sunday best, sermon and prayer book. Neither does it concern itself with creed, dogma, ritual, nor orthodoxy. These very things have frightened many of us, have kept us out of the church for years.

The Spiritual program of AA is a simple and basic thing, as simple as attendance at Sunday School of our childhood. In Sunday School we were not asked to listen to sermons, and about the only prayer we knew was the simplest and best, The Lord's Prayer. We were told the stories of David and Goliath, Samson and his amazing strength, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan. As we grew older we learned something of the history of religion, something about the more complex parts of the Bible. When we outgrew Sunday School we were ready to take part in Church with a fair understanding of what it was all about.

Boiled down to its essence, Christianity, in fact Spirituality, is simply **LOVE**. When you perform an act of pure love, something completely unselfish with no hope of gain or reward, you are participating in AA's Spiritual program.

You are sitting in your living room on a foul night, enjoying an open fire and a good book. A high wind is slamming the snow against your window, the thermometer reads 10 above. You are unconsciously grateful that you have no reason to go out. Then the telephone calls you and you hear a frantic feminine voice:

"My husband is coming out of a binge and says he wants to quit drinking. Someone told me you were a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Won't you **PLEASE** come over and see him?"

Do you tell her you are sorry, but you wouldn't consider coming out on such a night, and please call someone else whose number you'll give her? Do you deny belonging to AA? Do you tell her, and not without some truth, that her husband will probably keep until morning?

You do not. You pull on your overshoes and overcoat, tell your wife not to worry because you'll be home in an hour or so, go out and battle a stubborn motor, then slide and skid your way to the address of a man who needs help, even as you once needed help. His understanding is not too clear, but you spend a couple of hours telling him the AA story. You call the hospital and arrange to get him a bed. You finally deliver him to the hospital, with probably a stop or two along the road for a demanded final drink. When you get back to your cozy living room, the log fire has gone out, your wife has long since gone to bed, you are worn out. And as you climb wearily into your own bed you reflect that this is just the beginning. Tomorrow you must get away from work to see your new "baby" in the hospital. You must telephone and reassure his wife, explaining what she must expect. You must call a score of your AA friends to visit him. Then you must get him to his first meetings and in general, steer him onto the path someone started you onto not so long ago.

Out of all this trouble, this disruption of your life, what reward do you expect? Do you expect a pat on the back? Do you expect your "baby" to throw business your way or become a client? You DO NOT. Your only reward, and it comes without asking, will be the feeling of having done some good, perhaps saved a life., brought a little happiness into this world.

And if your "baby" is not a success, if AA doesn't take with him, are you going to throw up the sponge? Are you going to tie one on your self? Are you going to sulk and give it all up as a bad job?

You are not. You will continue your Twelfth Step work, giving another alcoholic the same break that someone gave you.

You have performed a completely selfless act, an act of pure love. And whether or not you realize it: **YOU HAVE HAD A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE!**

VII

AS WE GROW OLDER in AA we grow more critical about the leaders we hear at meetings. "They all talk about their drinking experiences," complains the old-timer. "I know the answers when it comes to drinking. In fact I could tell most of them a thing or two of my own. What I want to hear about is how they keep sober."

Of course, this complaint isn't completely justified. Great numbers of our AA leaders tell inspiring, helpful stories. We do not, of course, have many professional orators. Mostly the speakers are just you and me, and Joe and Fred, and perhaps Jane and Mary. Our background of public speaking probably consists of brilliant (?) and profound (?) remarks from time to time uttered in the presence of gathered barflies in a tavern. Furthermore, if you have lead your first meeting

yourself, you will remember the butterflies in your stomach and the dryness in your throat as you stood up before the group. So the new speaker will naturally talk about the things that come easiest to him -- his case history as a lush. However, somewhere along the line he will tell you something about his introduction to AA, something about his gratitude, something about the new peace and happiness he has found.

We can do nothing to change the speakers, but We CAN do something about our listening.

Here is the story of how one man learned to listen. Let's call him Martin, for convenience.

Martin, when younger, had a fine voice and sang in a church choir. That was before he found that choir singing didn't give him ample time for drinking, so he quite naturally gave up the former. The Pastor of the church was an extremely brilliant man, noted throughout the entire state for his fine and thought-inspiring sermons. And yet, when Martin's wife would ask him after church what the sermon was about, he'd hem and haw and finally come up with some weighty answer such as "He's against sin." This worried Martin, because try as he would, he could never bring home a satisfactory condensed version of the sermon. He gave it his best thought. The clergyman, he reasoned, was a highly educated man. He gave probably a week's preparation to a sermon that took him twenty minutes to deliver. With so much thought packed into twenty minutes, Martin felt that perhaps he was justified in becoming somewhat confused. So he hit upon a simple device. Thereafter he listened carefully until the pastor said something that impressed him as being particularly worth while. Then he stopped listening and concentrated on digesting and enlarging upon that one thought in his own mind.

Martin carried this idea into AA with the result that he never attends a meeting without carrying something away.

If you can absorb one constructive thought a day, at the end of a year you will have 365 helpful ideas packed into the back of your mind, and in ten years you'll have 3,650, a lot of ideas! Nor do you know when you'll be grateful for one of those ideas to help you out of trouble.

VIII

HERE ARE A FEW suggestions for leaders, that they may make their meetings more interesting.

1. Prepare what you have to say beforehand. It is simply an act of courtesy to your listeners to have a grasp of your subject.
2. Don't depend on your memory. It is particularly tricky when you are the

center of attraction. Make notes on what you intend to say, or write out the talk in full. There is nothing quite so embarrassing to a speaker, nor for his sympathetic audience, as a blank spot. Ten seconds seem like 10 minutes when you can't remember what to say next. Lapse of memory attacks even the most experienced lecturers and actors. So be prepared with notes.

3. Keep it as brief as possible and still tell your story. No one remembers one iota about Edward Everett's two hour speech at Gettysburg, but everyone knows what Abraham Lincoln took less than five minutes to say. Alcoholics don't like to sit too long. They are a nervous breed and what good you may have done in the first twenty minutes or so of your talk can easily be undone if you stretch it into an hour.

4. When you have said what you have to say, stop. That is one value of notes -- when you reach the end of them your talk is over.

5. If your Group's type of meeting calls for discussion from the floor after you have ended your talk, watch the interest closely. If it lags, end the meeting. There is no rule in AA providing for a meeting to last thirty minutes, an hour, two hours or any specified time. And long waits between responses from the floor can be as embarrassing as a lapse in memory during the talk itself.

IN CONCLUSION

The suggestions contained in this pamphlet are a digest of thoughts expressed by AA's in Akron, where Alcoholics Anonymous was started in 1935. Some of the thoughts are those of members whose sobriety dates back to the early days of AA. They are by no means conclusive. They merely scratch the surface, but it is the hope of the Editors that they may be helpful as a preliminary guide to those who are entering the second phase of AA. For, as was pointed out earlier in these pages, the purpose of AA is not only to guide alcoholics to sobriety, but to lead them along the path of continued better, fuller living.

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