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A VIEW FROM SERENITY HILL

A Newsletter from La Hacienda

September 2004

Alcoholics Anonymous-A Spiritual Entity

The following will be a comparison of the information from the text/lectures and my experience with Alcoholics Anonymous as an active member.

First, let's define alcoholic. According to the Big Book of "Alcoholics Anonymous" a person who cannot quit drinking once given sufficient reason is an alcoholic. There are as many examples of sufficient reasons as there are members (approx. 2 million). My experience was that I was hospitalized five times with pancreatitis and still did not quit. The text book gives a brief overview of NA and AA on page 432. Although accurate in its description it still leaves a lot of room for clarity. Alcoholics Anonymous is a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose--that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers (Tradition Five). AA teaches us that our problem was an internal condition, a spiritual malady or hole in our lives and alcohol was our solution to feeling better on a daily basis. The Twelve Steps will not get you sober, they get you connected to God and He will remove the obsession to drink and drug. This statement always startles the newcomer and the uninformed alike. Simply reading the Steps carefully should clarify this point. Seven of the Twelve Steps mention God either by name or implication.

The first three steps are devoted to humbling ourselves and turning our lives and our will over to the care of God. Simply put, #1 I Can't, #2 He Can, #3 I'll Let Him.

Step four and five are to help us identify our defects of character that led us to the disconnected life. In step five we say these out loud to God and another human being.

This is a very freeing experience. Step six and seven are us asking God to help us get rid of these defects. In steps eight and nine we make a thorough list of the people we have harmed and the wreckage of our past then make

it right with those people. Once the amends process is complete in step nine we are ready to move on to the daily maintenance of our lives. On page 85 in the Big Book Bill W. tells us "What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition." (This is also where the misquote "One day at a time" is derived.) We stay connected one day at a time, we stay sober for good! Steps ten and eleven are how we maintain our spiritual connection on a daily basis. Step twelve tells us we WILL have a spiritual awakening as a result of working these steps. We are then duty bound to carry this message to the alcoholic who is lost and practice these principles in all our affairs. Dr. Silkworth speaks of this on page XXIX, "unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of recovery." It continues, "One feels that something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change." As you can see, Alcoholics Anonymous is not just about quitting drinking, it is about learning a whole new way to live. It is really a very simple program, not easy but simple. Two of the bedevilmets listed on page 52(bb) are "We were full of fear" and "We were unhappy" they are replaced on page 83 (bb) with the promises "We will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us." and "We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness." The textbook did a good job of stating part of the philosophy of AA: "If you want what we have to offer and are willing to go to any length to get it-then you are ready to take certain steps" (bb pg 58). I always like to add a section to that for the newcomer. In the chapter "There Is a Solution" on page 25 in the Big Book Bill W writes:

"There is a solution. Almost none of us liked the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process requires

for its successful consummation. But we saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it. When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, there was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet. We have found much of heaven and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed."

The debate over the terms recovered verses recovering is an interesting discussion. Those who use the term recovering are slightly confused in my opinion. They seem to believe that since the alcoholic can never drink again and the disease is not curable that they will always be recovering. These are usually the people in meetings who are not carrying a Big Book and are still on step three after being sober for two years. (The Big Book states we should work these steps with the desperation of a drowning man or in other words as quickly as possible. It does not say "one day at a time". In my case it took approx. 45 days.) I'm what some refer to as a Big Book Thumper. On page XIII, the Foreword to the First Edition the second sentence clearly states "To show other alcoholics precisely how we have RECOVERED is the main purpose of this book". Being recovered in no way implies that we are now free to resume drinking. Let me illustrate: a man is shot in the leg during a drive by shooting, he goes to the hospital, is treated, and released. His wounds heal over time. He has RECOVERED from the gunshot, this does not make him bulletproof.

The points made above should explain why if you ever see me at a meeting you will hear my introduction as: Hi, my name is Steve, a very grateful recovered alcoholic.

Steve

CHRIS SAYS...

Buck-a-roos,

"How do you know if you are spiritually fit?" a lady in a meeting last night asked that question. Interesting question I thought. Lots of folks had different thoughts on it. One guy said "if you ain't drinking today, you're spiritually fit!" That's certainly not my experience. I have done some VERY crazy things while not drinking! Another lady said when she felt the nearness of her Creator, she was fit. Is the only time we feel connected is in the middle of a Spiritual Experience? If we have to be standing in a burning bush to be connected, some of us are going to be a bit disappointed.

These are my thoughts on it. Be interesting to see if any of you agree!

The Big Book talks about a relationship with God that works continually, whether we "feel" it or not. When I crawled into that dumpster in Houston, I can assure you, I was feeling NOTHING but fear. There's not a doubt though that God was there! I can't turn this "feeling of God's presence" on and off. God isn't "pay per view"! Being Spiritually Fit means I can be comfortable in my own skin no matter what's going on around me. This is all INSIDE stuff! If my comfort level or happiness depends on my OUTSIDE circumstances, I am truly UNFIT. I wish I could tell you I'm fit all the time...ya'll know that would be a BIG lie. Sometimes Life just flat makes me CRANKY!

Early each morning, I get a chance to get to take my own pulse. Where am I? Scared? Resentful? Full of self-pity? ME?... NO! I get to ask myself why (p67), then I get to ask God to center me again. Why am I afraid? Because I think I'm doing this thing called life by myself? Pretty arrogant. Sixteen years sober and I still find myself lost sometimes.

When I can remember that

God is in charge and remember the things I'm grateful for, I believe I am Spiritually Fit. Too many of us are looking for that Spiritual High. I was promised a sense of peace and serenity. That's what I want. I've seen enough visions for one lifetime! If I can get dressed without having a meltdown, drive to work with the clear understanding that the road is NOT mine, if I can get up to that Podium in the Bodega and remember how fortunate I am to have this job...I think I'm fit. When I go to that meeting tonight and not take anybody's inventory, I know I am good.

Heck. I can't even write this without being overcome with gratitude for all I have been given. Nothing I deserved! I ought to be dead. God's Grace gave me another shot at this life. Everyday.

Some friends in Austin sold us some t-shirts that simply say "blessed" on the front. I'm gonna go put one on!

Been traveling around a lot lately. Been great seeing so many of ya'll out there! You stay close!

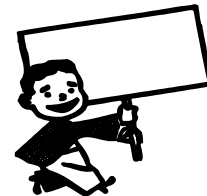
xoxo - Chris R.
craymer@lahacienda.com

ALICIA SAYS...

Hello Alumni,

I can't believe that it's time to write again and as I start typing, I have the familiar experience of wondering where God wants to go with this article. So many experi-

Great web site for you **Big Book Thumpers!** Check it out soon!
<http://aaprimarypurpose.org/noticebook.htm>



ences floating around in my head...so many people out there struggling...so many important quotes of hope from the book...where do I begin?

Things here on the hill are eventful, as usual. As this disease continues to roar through people's lives, the admissions remain at a steady pace. It is very heartbreaking to see the devastation on the faces of those who come in. I know their minds are racing with fear - so many questions...so much pain...so very hopeless. I know I can relate to those feelings, as can so many of you who have united with us on this journey. This is where it all begins though - this is where the desperation to do something different comes from. Pain is an amazing motivator and that has been a recurrent theme throughout my life, even in sobriety. This dire misery was a starting point for all of us and once the decision was made, our actions pulled us to the Light we have come to know so well. As a result, we have a spiritual experience which brings the freedom, joy, and peace we have been lacking our entire life - not to mention, removes the obsession to drink or do dope. I guess this is where this article is gonna go...I want to talk about this "personality change" that is "sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism" (BB pg. 567).

Throughout the book, this experience is called many different things: spiritual awakening, psychic change, huge emotional displacements and rearrangements...to name a few. My favorite depiction of this experience is "a profound alteration in his reaction to life" (BB pg.567). Basically, this told me that after taking the required action I was going to react to life differently. Throughout my whole life I had been a victim, my selfish soul thought of only me, I couldn't tell the truth to save my life, I threw huge tantrums when I was told "no", and I cunningly manipulated

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33rd Annual Alumni Reunion
May 6-8, 2005
Make Plans to Attend

Upcoming Events

Sept 3-4	It's my Bday and I will be in Vegas. NOT talking!	
Sept 11	The Serenity Porch Group Anniversary Chris speaks at 6:30 PM (Allison K 973-442-9152)	Rockaway, NJ
Sept 17	CA Fundraiser Chris speaks at 8 PM (Adam 214-335-5049)	Dallas, TX
Sept 18	Richardson Group Anniversary AA Chris speaks 8 PM (Susan 972-783-4521)	Richardson, TX
Sept 25	CA Fajita Cook-off (7AM—2PM) La Ha River Property (Chris R 800-749-6160 ext 510)	Hunt, TX
Oct 16	Bluff City Convention AA Chris speaks 8 PM	Memphis , TN
Oct 30	AA Workshop and talk Chris speaks (Doug 509-945-5598)	Yakima, WA
Nov 5	Tulsa AA Chris speaks (Tanya 918-284-0845)	Tulsa, OK
Nov 18-21	Denmark AA Convention Chris and Alicia will speak	Denmark

Call for Details: 1-800-749-6160
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every one around me – on my own power, this is how I react to life. So, as I got further along in this work, I started to notice that God had entered my heart and things were changing in me from the inside out. My character changed, my reactions changed, my relationships changed, my personality changed...all around me there was change and it happened to be "sufficient enough to bring about recovery from alcoholism". The prayer of St. Francis reminds me of this transformation – asking God to take who I am and make me the opposite... hatred to love, wrong to forgiveness, discord to harmony, error to truth, shadows to light, and sadness to joy. I can't do any of that on my own power. The despairing faces that I see in this fellowship are not experiencing this change and their eyes reflect it. Those who are struggling to survive are not putting in the effort necessary to make the experience happen. Once it has happened, however, there is no doubting that this Power is real and attainable, but there is a catch – you have to KEEP moving forward...we can't "rest on our laurels" or get complacent - this is something that we must never forget.

affected and the discomfort that came as a result of this was the motivator to get busy once again. Thank God for grace and mercy... thank God for this program...thank God for changing my personality – I needed it!

Do you see yourself reacting to life differently than you did in the past? Are you continuing to move forward and grow closer to this Power who loves you? I hope you are finding these things true in your life...if not, GET BUSY!!! You know how it goes...you're either moving towards the Light or towards the darkness. Which is it gonna be? Please call if you need anything and know that you are loved by so many – no matter what.

Love always - Alicia

DJ SAYS...

anew@lahacienda.com

Hey Alumni,

Sometimes it seems that this is one of the hardest parts of my job. Writing this letter and trying to carry a message of hope is not where the difficulty lies. However staying real is the tough part. I think that perhaps some of you guys out there might be able to relate to that. We all know that the Big Book says that God wants us to be "Happy, Joyous and Free." Sometimes I think that we forget that the promises tell us that we will know a NEW freedom and a NEW happiness. This to me implies something different than what those words used to mean to me. The truth for me is that when eve-

rything is going my way I find it relatively easy to be happy. My experience of life in recovery has been that often circumstances do not go the way "I think" that they should or in a way that "I" would find comfortable to "me". The fact is that sometimes things in life are painful to me. So what is this NEW happiness in the face of pain? What does that NEW freedom look like?

I recently had the opportunity to look at this. Last week my brother-in-law, whom I was very close to growing up and who had a great deal of influence on my life, was killed in a freak accident. (A tree fell on him while he was sleeping in his hammock) He was 44 years old and to be perfectly honest a really nice guy. He was one of those people who lived his life on spiritual principles without having to be beat into submission by drugs and alcohol. (Weird huh?)

A few months ago he and my sister came to Kerrville to visit Ann and myself. During their stay I got to sit down over dinner and make some further amends to them. I had made amends when I first got sober but as time has gone by I was able to see some things that I hadn't seen before and I had the opportunity to thank him for the love and guidance that he gave to me growing up as a teenager. It was a really good experience for both of us. He was able to come up here to the hospital and see what I do and we talked about getting help for one of his friends. The thing I will never forget about that weekend is when they were getting in the car to leave he told me that he was really proud of me and what I was doing with my life. That

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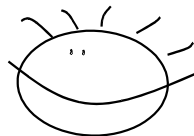


really meant a lot to me. You see He was always the good guy, the responsible one and I was....not. We have stayed in pretty close contact since then with e-mails and phone calls a couple of times a week. So when he died I was able to go up to Tulsa where he and my sister lived and be of service to my family in their time of need. I got to experience the HAPPINESS about the healing God had brought about in our lives. When they closed the coffin at the end of the service I knew the FREEDOM of knowing that everything was right between my brother and I before God called him home. I have felt the JOY of people who genuinely care about me lifting me up with their support through some difficult times.

Without God in my life and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous at my disposal none of these things are possible for me. In closing I would like to thank all of you for being part of my life. If you are going thru some difficulties yourself, pick up the phone and allow someone else to be part of your life. Most importantly clean up your side of the street because you never know what tomorrow is going to bring.

Peace and Love – DJ
dshay@lahacienda.com

PS: Don't forget to wish Deb Happy Birthday.



Deborah Says...

Hi Gang!

As I look at where I am today, I am overwhelmed by the love that surrounds me. When my dad contacted La Hacienda 3 years ago, among many things, he was told, "we'll love her if she'll let us." Such a simple statement that meant so much. You see, until I walked onto the campus of La Hacienda, I didn't think I was worthy of being loved – by my family, my friends, God – anyone. Sadly enough, I also wasn't sure I had ever truly loved anybody or anything – not pure, unconditional love. Thanks to those who came before me and shared a message of hope, I have been able to experience unconditional love – to give and to receive.

I truly believe God places people in our lives for a specific purpose and at a specific time. When I needed patience and understanding, there was a woman who was able to listen and be compassionate. When I needed courage, strength and independence, there was yet another woman who shared her experience and provided guidance. When I needed laughter and FUN, there has never been a shortage of members of the fellowship willing to show up. The Big Book tells us we will make "lifelong friends" through the fellowship. On pages 152-153, the book says, "You will be bound to them

with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey. Then you will know what it means to give of yourself that others may survive and rediscover life. You will learn the full meaning of 'Love thy neighbor as thyself'. Not only was I finally able to understand what love meant but I had a purpose as well – to share the message of Alcoholics Anonymous and help others find a Power greater than themselves who will allow them to live again – free from drugs, alcohol and INSANITY.

Each person I have met in sobriety has, in one way or another, contributed to my becoming the woman I am today. Had I shut my heart and my mind off to some of those people because their experiences were different or because their background differed from mine or, God forbid, their drug of choice was different, I would have lost a multitude of opportunities for growth.

One of the things I am having to look at today is my comfort zone. Am I doing anything to shake it up a bit? I am so comfortable going to the same meetings at the same place and talking to the same people – what am I doing to have a new experience? I know a lot of you probably find yourself doing the same thing. Going to the same safe and comfortable meetings at the same clubhouse and at the same time from week to week. We're supposed to have a home

group so we justify our complacency with that notion. However, aren't we missing an opportunity to grow or help someone else to grow? Sure, I'm willing to talk to the newcomer who walks through the doors at my home group but am I willing to walk into a meeting where I don't know anyone and no one knows me? Hmmmm. Sure does make me squirm to think about it. How many experiences am I missing out on while I sit comfortably in my home group?

We talk about the meetings in our area where they aren't using the Big Book or they are having open discussion "war story" meetings and we criticize their direction. How about taking a stand and going to one of those meetings and being a messenger of the solution that God has so generously provided us? Rattle the cage a bit – being careful not to cause controversy but to carry the message in the 164 pages the way God intended – with willingness, patience

and action. We can't change anything if we sit back and wait for someone else to do it. I'm taking a stand today (yikes!) – to seek out a new meeting and a new experience – I hope some of you are encouraged to do the same.

It is my responsibility to share the freedom and gratitude I have today with those who are still searching for an answer. I hope I always have an open heart and an open mind for the people God places before me. I had such a shortage of friends before I came into the fellowship and to be so blessed with the people God has placed in my life today is overwhelming. A friend recently told me that people are placed in my life for a safe place to be me. I like that idea. I hope to always find room for more people to be placed in my life so I may continue to grow.

Be well – Deborah
ddoherty@lahacienda.com



ANNOUNCEMENT

The *University of Texas at Austin* is proud to open *The Center for Students in Recovery* this fall, 2004. The Center is a community of students that share the common goals of recovery. It will provide numerous and diverse opportunities for students in recovery to learn, grow, and provide service to others, both within and outside of the University setting.

CSR students will:

- Complete a 3-credit hour academic course: *Principles of Recovery and Relapse Prevention*
- Participate in weekly individual and/or group sessions with addictions professionals that will address issues relevant to substance abuse recovery and relapse prevention
- Receive academic support, including tutoring and mandatory study group session attendance where needed
- Volunteer service time and effort to the UT Austin and the Greater Austin area recovery communities
- Attend on- and off-campus 12-Step and/or other recovery-related support groups
- Attend weekly *Celebration of Recovery* events that acknowledge and celebrate individuals' milestones in recovery
- Develop close associations and relationships with a community of recovering students
- Continue to stay connected and be of service to CSR after graduating through a UT Austin CSR Alumni Association
- Give back to the program through recovery alumni support

For more information about the Center you can visit the website at www.utexas.edu/student/health/promotion/recovery.html or contact the Center at 475-8352.

Websites of Interest:



- <http://houston.lahacienda.com>
- <http://dallas.lahacienda.com>
- <http://corpuschristi.lahacienda.com>
- <http://lubbock.lahacienda.com>
- <http://midland.lahacienda.com>
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