

B2B

Back to Basics “The Alcoholics Anonymous Beginners Meetings”

Introduction

I

Prior to the publication of this book in 1997, the Beginners' Meetings were a forgotten piece of Alcoholics Anonymous history. Very few people in recovery knew anything about the four one-hour sessions that played such an important role in the initial success of the Twelve Step movement.

These meetings were held throughout the United States and Canada during a period of time when A.A. enjoyed an 50-75 percent recovery rate from alcoholism. Newcomers quickly learned “How it Works.” They had conversion experiences, discovered a new way of living without alcohol, and carried this message of hope to others.

By taking the Twelve Steps in these Beginners' Meetings, tens of thousands of A.A.'s found the spiritual solution to alcoholism. They completed the Steps in about a month. Then, in order to ensure their own sobriety, they helped others through the Steps and led the Beginners' Meetings.

This book is a re-enactment of the sessions as they were held in the mid 1940's. The format is based solely on the author's interpretation of the available source material.

In the early days, no two meeting leaders conducted these session in exactly the same way. The same is true today. We urge those interested in starting an A.A. Beginners' Meeting or to use this format as a guide – a starting point. Feel free to modify this program, but please keep in mind that those who have remained true to the Dr. Bob “keep it simple” philosophy have had the greatest success.

In the 1940's there was little controversy surrounding the Beginners Meetings. They served a very important purpose – to save lives Even Bill W., the co-founder of A.A., insisted that we let God rather than “control committees” guide us in our lifesaving efforts. In September 1945, he wrote an article for The Grapevine in which he stated that if A.A. were to succeed, it must be governed by God and not by rules or rule makers:

“Were we to proceed by rules, somebody would have to make them and, more difficult still, somebody would have to enforce them. ‘Rule-making’ has often been tried. It usually results in controversy among the ‘rule makers’ as to what the rules should be...”

Our experience tells us these universal truths (the 12 Steps) work. (We are) ruled, not by people, but by principles... and, as most of us would say, (we are) ruled by God.”

This concept later became the cornerstone of A.A.'s Second Tradition, which states, “For our group purpose there is **but one Ultimate Authority**, a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.” Throughout the United States and Canada during the 1940's and 1950's, many A.A. Groups were guided to start Beginners' Meetings. These meetings provided newcomers with a safe and structured environment in which to take the Twelve Steps and recover from alcoholism.

II

Chapter One contains a small portion of the written record on the Beginners' Meetings. This information confirms that these sessions were an integral part of the early success of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Chapters Two through Five are re-enactments of the four one-hour Beginners' Meetings as conducted in 1946. In these sessions, the author has tried to remain true to the “Big Book” as well as to the old-timers who originally led these meetings.

Chapter Six provides additional insight into the inner workings of the Beginners' Meetings. In the 1940's, A.A.'s used an Assets and Liabilities checklist to take the Fourth and Fifth Steps. During daily “quiet times,” they conducted a written Eleventh Step. By remaining involved for three to six months, they learned how to sponsor others through these four one-hour sessions.

In the mid-1940's there was only one Twelve Step program and only one book that described the spiritual solution to addiction – The “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous. Since then, the book has been a great help for those with other difficulties. But because Back to Basics is and A.A. meeting format, we ask that:

"If you have a problem other than alcohol, substitute your addiction, affliction or compulsive behavior for the word alcohol each time you see or hear it during these Beginners' Meetings. If you do this, you too will recover as the direct result of taking ALL Twelve Steps in four one-hour sessions."

Although a considerable amount of recovery literature has been written since the "Big Book," it is still the only publication that provides the directions on how to take the Steps. *Alcoholics Anonymous* provides clear and concise instructions on how to develop an intimate, two-way relationship with the "Power greater than ourselves that resides "deep down within us".

The "Big Book" authors tell us that this "Power greater than ourselves." We surrender our lives to this Power will "accomplish those things for us which we could never do for ourselves", By taking the Steps, we identify and remove the blocks that have separated us from this Power so we can listen to and follow the "God – consciousness within." The authors provide us with a simple test to separate self-will from God's will. They emphasize that "working with others" is essential in order to "keep in fit spiritual condition."

On page 59, the "Big Book" authors describe the solution to all of our problems, including alcoholism:

"But there is One who has all power – that One is God. May you find Him now!"

The following text was extracted from the Back to Basics book authored by Wally P. and researched with the assistance of James H (sober 68 years through the Oxford Group) and is used here as an introduction to the purpose of this group.

I

The book is a re-enactment of the Beginners meetings that were a very important and highly successful part of A.A.'s early history.

(Group Moderator offers this Note:- Since we are an online email group, we can only offer guidelines and cannot fulfill the criteria for the face to face Beginners Meetings, where it is suggested that each member be working with a "Sponsor." Therefore we strongly suggest and urge each member to work with a Sponsor/"Friend"/"Mentor/Sharing Partner"/"Online Sponsor", at the very least, when going through the Steps)

Alcoholics Anonymous has found an answer to this insidious illness. As members of A.A., we are here to share our solution with you - a spiritually based plan of action that will remove your compulsion to drink and provide you with a new way of living without alcohol.

In the coming weeks, we will learn how to recover from the affliction of alcoholism by taking the Twelve Steps as outlined in the book Alcoholics Anonymous. p.34

The "Big Book" is the only book we will use during these meetings, except for an occasional reference to an A.A. pamphlet, newsletter article or source material used to write the "Big Book." If you cannot find something we say in the "Big Book," consider it to be our opinion rather than fact. (b2b p.36)

Each group has developed its own guidelines for conducting the Beginners' Meetings. However, all these groups have one thing in common. They provide a safe, structured environment in which newcomers learn the principles of A.A., take the Steps, and have spiritual experiences. (b2b p.37)

II

Let's start by turning to the Forward of the "Big Book" which is on Roman numeral page 13 (xiii). The first paragraph states:

"We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book."

So, the "Big Book" authors immediately tell us that the purpose of this book is to show us how to recover from alcoholism. This is a revolutionary statement, because until this book was written, there was no hope for alcoholics. Now, anyone who is willing to follow the directions they have provided, can recover.

This message of hope is expressed again in the third paragraph on page 17: (b2b p.40)

"The tremendous fact for everyone of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action. This is the great news this book carries to those who suffer from alcoholism." (A.A. p.17, para 3, lines 1-6)

In the third paragraph on page 25, the authors explain that for us, there is no middle ground. We are either going to die from alcoholism or else find a spiritual solution:

"If you are as seriously alcoholic as we were, we believe there is no middle-of-the-road solution. We were in a position where life was becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there is no return through human aid, we had but two alternatives: One was to go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation s best we could; and the other, to accept spiritual help." (A.A., p.25 para 3, lines 1-8)

In the first paragraph on page 44, they describe the alcoholic and then tell us what it is going to take to recover. Starting with the fourth line, they write:

".....If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be

suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer." (A.A., p. 44, para. 1, lines 4-9)
(b2b p.41)

Let's read that last line again.

"...you may be suffering from an illness which ONLY a spiritual experience will conquer."

We realize this is not the answer many of you expected to find in Alcoholics Anonymous. But, please keep in mind that alcoholism is a fatal illness. Prior to A.A., most alcoholics either died drunk or were locked up in jails or insane asylums.

In the second paragraph on page 44, the authors once again tell us our options:

"To one who feels he is an atheist or agnostic such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as he is means disaster, especially if he is an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis are not always easy alternatives to face." (A.A., p.44, para. 2, lines 1-6)

Not only is a spiritual experience possible, it is a guarantee. Just keep an open mind and take the Steps as described in the "Big Book." (b2b p.42)

In the third paragraph on page 44, they tell us that no matter what our present beliefs, there is hope for us:

"But it isn't difficult. About half our original fellowship were of exactly that type. At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, hoping against hope we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life -- or else. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted." (A.A., p.44, para. 3, lines 1-9)

We find it amazing that the newcomer can start the A.A. program without any specific beliefs or, for that matter, without any beliefs whatsoever. All a person needs is the open-mindedness and the willingness to believe that we believe this program works.

And let us assure you, we do believe. The Twelve Steps have changed our lives and the lives of thousands of other alcoholics. This program will change your life too, if you honestly want to recover from this deadly affliction. (b2b p.43)

Step 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.

I

Surrender is essential in order to recover from alcoholism. The "Big Book" authors devote 51 pages of the book to the first part of the surrender process which is to admit we have a problem.

The authors begin by describing the physical and mental symptoms of alcoholism. Later they ask us to acknowledge that we are alcoholics. Before we can do this, we need to know what an alcoholic is.

Much of "The Doctor's Opinion" is based on two letters written by Dr. William D. Silkworth, a physician at Towns Hospital in New York City. In the late 1930's, very little was known about alcoholism, but much of what Dr. Silkworth wrote then is still relevant today.

In the first paragraph on Roman numeral page 23(xxiii), Dr. Silkworth describes how Bill W., one of the co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, recovered from alcoholism. Bill had once been a well respected Wall Street stock analyst, but he had lost everything because of his drinking:

"In late 1934 I attended a patient who, though he had been a competent businessman of good earning capacity, was an alcoholic of a type I had come to regard as hopeless. In the course of his third treatment he acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. As part of his rehabilitation he commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing upon them that they must do likewise with still others. This has become the basis of a rapidly growing fellowship of these men and their families. This man and over one hundred others appear to have recovered. I personally know scores of cases who were of the type with whom other methods had failed completely."(A.A., p. xxiii, para. 1, lines 13-26)

For several years prior to 1934, Dr. Silkworth had been treating alcoholics at Towns Hospital with very little success. Then, during his third trip to the hospital, Bill discovered the spiritual solution to alcoholism which he helped develop into the A.A. program.

One of the things Bill learned while in Towns Hospital was that he had to work with other alcoholics in order to stay sober himself. He also learned that alcoholism was a physical and a mental illness which only a spiritual experience would conquer.

In the first paragraph on Roman numeral page 24(xxiv), the authors confirm that Dr. Silkworth was well aware of the physical aspects of alcoholism:

"The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture must believe - that the body of the alcoholic is quite as abnormal as his mind. It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete."(A.A., p. xxiv, para. 1, lines 1-14)

Let's look at this abnormal physical reaction to alcohol. Alcohol is a poison. The normal reaction to alcohol is to have one or two drinks and stop. But, our reaction is much different. We have one or two drinks to get started.

In the fifth paragraph on Roman numeral page 28(xxviii), Dr. Silkworth tells us that, because of this abnormal reaction, we must refrain from drinking:

"All these, and many others, have one symptom in common: they cannot start drinking without developing the phenomenon of craving. This phenomenon...differentiates these people, and sets them apart as a distinct entity. It has never been, by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently eradicated. The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence."(A.A., p. xxviii, para. 5, lines 1-3 and 5-8)

So much for alcoholics ever becoming social drinkers again.

II

Abstinence might work if alcoholism was only a physical illness, but Dr. Silkworth found that alcoholism has a mental component as well. In addition to an abnormal physical reaction, we have a mental obsession. Our mind tells us we are O.K., even as alcohol is bringing us closer and closer to death. No matter how much we may want to stop, sooner or later we will return to drinking.

Dr. Silkworth describes this mental obsession in his letter on Roman numeral page 26 (xxvi). Please keep in mind Dr. Silkworth is talking about alcoholics, when he writes in the fourth paragraph:

"Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks - drinks which they see others taking with impunity."(A.A., p.xxvi, para. 4, lines 1-6; p. xxvii, lines 1-3)

On page 30, starting with the fourth line in the first paragraph, the "Big Book" authors describe how this mental obsession kills so many of us:

"Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every normal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death."(A.A., p.30, para. 1, lines 4-10)

The authors further emphasize the mental obsession in the second paragraph on page 34. They state that, no matter how strong our willpower or our conviction, we cannot stop drinking on our own:

"For those who are unable to drink moderately the question is how to stop altogether. We are assuming, of course, that the reader desires to stop. Whether such a person can quit upon a nonspiritual basis depends upon the extent to which he has already lost the power to choose whether he will drink or not. Many of us felt that we had plenty of character. There was a tremendous urge to cease forever. Yet we found it impossible. This is the baffling feature of alcoholism as we know it - this utter inability to leave it alone, no matter how great the necessity or the wish."(A.A., p.34, para. 2, lines 1-11)

You see, if our minds didn't lie to us and tell us that it's ok to drink, we would never trigger the physical craving for more and more alcohol. So, we have an abnormal reaction of the body and obsession of the mind which dooms us to an alcoholic death. Back on Roman numeral page 27 (xxvii), Dr. Silkworth tells us our only hope is a life-changing, conversion experience. Starting with the third line down from the top of the page, he writes:

"...After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery."(A.A., p. xxvii, lines 3-9)

So, a prominent doctor in the field of alcoholism states that the medical community can't help us. Our only hope is a spiritual awakening.

III

Now, lets move on to "Bill's Story." In this chapter we learn more about the physical and mental aspects of alcoholism, and more about the spiritual solution. As we mentioned earlier, Bill is the New York stock analyst who is one of our co-founders.

Some people have difficulty identifying with Bill's story because he was such a low-bottom , hopeless alcoholic. Here, as elsewhere in the book, we ask that you look for similarities rather than differences. See where you can identify with Bill as he continues to use alcohol long after it has become a problem.

In the first seven pages, Bill describes the progressive nature of his drinking. In a few short years he loses everything. He becomes an unemployed, hopeless alcoholic.

In the first paragraph on page 8, Bill has a moment of clarity. He realizes he is powerless over alcohol. He is licked - defeated:

"No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master."(A.A., p.8, para. 1, lines 1-5)

But Bill can't stop drinking on this admission alone. In late November 1934, he is visited by an old high school chum, Ebby T. Bill is drunk. Ebby has been sober for several months. When Bill asks Ebby how he stopped drinking, Ebby tells him, "I've got religion." Bill is shocked but he lets Ebby continue because, as he writes, "my gin would last longer than his preaching."

But, Ebby doesn't preach to Bill. Instead, Ebby describes a group of people he has recently met who practice two-way prayer. They listen to God and follow the guidance they receive. This organization is called the Oxford Group.

The Oxford Group is a life-changing fellowship that practices Four Spiritual Activities. These are:

1. Surrender - Our First, Second and Third Steps.
2. Sharing - our Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Steps.
3. Restitution - our Eighth and Ninth Steps.
4. Guidance - our Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Steps.

Ebby provides Bill with the Oxford Group solution. For the first time, Bill learns he can change his life by turning his will over to a God of his understanding.

IV

Soon after Ebby's visit, Bill checks into Towns Hospital. There, under the direction of Dr. Silkworth, Bill is physically withdrawn from alcohol for the third time that year. While in the hospital, Bill applies to the Oxford Group Four Spiritual Activities.

In the second paragraph on page 13, Bill makes a complete Surrender:

"There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction."(A.A., p.13, para. 2, lines 1-3)

Immediately after his Surrender, Bill begins Sharing his inventory of character liabilities with Ebby. Starting with the second line in the second paragraph on page 13, Bill writes:

"...I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new found friend take them away, root and branch.....My schoolmate visited me, and I fully acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies."(A.A., p.13,para. 2, lines 5-7; para. 3, lines 1-2)

When Bill wrote, "I ruthlessly face my sins.....," he uses the Oxford Group definition for the word sin, which is anything that separates us from God or from one another. Selfish, self-centeredness is the cause. We free ourselves from these defects of character by following God's will rather than relying upon self-will.

Starting with the second line in the third paragraph on page 13, Bill agrees to make Restitution. This is an important part of moving from the problem, which is US, toward the solution, which is GOD:

"...We made a list of people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment. I expressed my entire willingness to approach these individuals, admitting my wrong. Never was I to be critical of them. I was to right all such matters to the utmost of my ability."(A.A., p. 13, para. 3, lines 2-7)

In the fourth paragraph on page 13, Bill gets quiet, listens to God and follows Guidance. These activities are essential for the establishing a two way communication with the Spirit of the Universe:

"I was to test my thinking by the new God-consciousness within. Common sense would thus become uncommon sense. I was to sit quietly when in doubt, asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as He would have me."(A.A., p. 13, para. 4, lines 1-5)

On page 14, starting with the second line in the sixth paragraph, Ebby explains the necessity of working with others:

"...Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead, he said. And how appallingly true for the alcoholic! For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead. If he did not work, he would surely drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die. Then faith would be dead indeed. With us it is just like that."(A.A., p.14, para. 6, lines 2-6; p.15, lines 1-5)

Bill takes the actions prescribed by the Oxford Group and has a sudden conversion experience. He has the "entire psychic change" that Dr. Silkworth talks about in "The Doctor's Opinion." In the second paragraph on page 14, Bill describes his spiritual awakening:

"These were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I fully accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and serenity as I had never known. There was utter confidence. I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through. God comes to most men gradually, but His impact on me was sudden and profound."(A.A., p.14, para. 2, lines 1-8)

Bill's life has changed. He hasn't had a drink since.

There is additional material within these 51 pages of the "Big Book" that further explains the physical and mental aspects of alcoholism and how our lives have become unmanageable as the result of our drinking. If you need more proof, please read on. All we've done is provide you with some of the highlights. However, we hope we've shown you enough for you to proceed.

V

Now its time for each of us to start our personal journey toward the spiritual experience that will change our lives. Let's see who is ready to take the First Step?

Step 1 We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.

The "Big Book" authors tell us exactly what we have to do. In the second paragraph on page 30, they write:

"We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed."(A.A., p.30, para. 2, lines 1-4)

In order to smash the delusion that we're not alcoholics, we are going to ask each of you to answer the simple question, "Are you ready to concede to your innermost self you are powerless over alcohol?" In other words, "Are you an alcoholic?" All that is required is a "yes" or "no" answer.

If you're not convinced you are an alcoholic or that your life is unmanageable, please let us know. Your "sponsor" or sharing partner is willing to spend time with you this week to discuss your reservations. We want to give you every opportunity to comprehend the devastating consequences of this terrible affliction.

Maybe you're not an alcoholic. Maybe you're here by mistake. We just want you to know we'd rather be inside the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous by mistake, than outside the fellowship, drinking and dying by mistake. It's something to think about.

O.K., for those who are ready, let's proceed. This is the First Step question:

DO YOU CONCEDE TO YOUR INNERMOST SELF YOU ARE AN ALCOHOLIC?

Please answer, one at a time, "yes" or "no."

Thank you.

Those of you who answered "yes" to this question have completed Step One.

So far we have covered 51 pages of the "Big Book" and taken the First Step. This is a remarkable achievement. Congratulations.

Step Two: Came to Believe that Power Greater than Ourselves Could Restore us to Sanity

I

Our goal is to recover from the seemingly hopeless state of mind and body known as alcoholism. And recover we will. The August 1946 issue of the A.A. Grapevine contains an article titled "Minneapolis Record Indicates that 75% are Successful in A.A." The article demonstrates the importance of the Beginners' Meetings. In Minneapolis, about half of those who stayed with the program for three months recovered from alcoholism. Almost three-fourths of those who remained involved for six months never drank again.

In other areas of the country where Beginners' Meetings are an integral part of the recovery process, we are seeing similar results. We remain involved in the Beginners' Meetings by taking the Twelve Steps, "sponsoring" others through the Steps, and, if possible, leading these sessions. If you participate in the Beginners' Meetings long enough, you will experience the miracle and you will recover from alcoholism.

During this session, we will take Steps Two and Three and we will provide you with the guidelines for taking the Fourth Step. During the next week, each newcomer will share his or her inventory with another person.

Several older members have told us the only way to understand the "Big Book" is to try to explain it to someone else. They were right. We didn't realize how little we knew about our textbook until we started leading these meetings.

So, we want to thank you for providing us the opportunity to learn more about our spiritual program of recovery by once again taking the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous along with you. As we have learned right here in these Beginners' Meetings, each time we take the Steps, we grow spiritually.

Before we begin, we need to make sure each newcomer has someone here to "sponsor" them through the Steps. In order for this process to work, it is essential that "sponsors" and newcomers attend the sessions together.

Are there any newcomers here for this second session without "sponsors?" If so, please stand. [Ask for volunteers to "sponsor" those who are standing.] Thank you. Please be seated.

(Optional: Is there anyone here tonight who didn't have the opportunity to take the First Step last week and would like to do so now? If so, please stand. [Ask the First Step question: Do you concede to your innermost self you are an alcoholic? Please answer, "yes" or "no." After you have answered, please be seated.] Thank you. Those of you who answered "yes" to this question have completed Step One.)

Let's start with a brief review of what we have learned so far. In the third paragraph on page 64 of the "Big Book," we find an excellent overview of the recovery process. Starting in the middle of the third line, the "Big Book" authors write:

"...for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically."(A.A., p. 64, para. 3, lines 3-6)

This is our goal - to correct the spiritual malady that has separated us from God and has doomed us, until now, to the living Hell of alcoholism.

If we are spiritually sick, how do we overcome this malady? The authors tell us we need to experience a psychic change - a spiritual awakening. Doctor Silkworth describes the effect of this change on the alcoholic in the first paragraph on Roman numeral page 27(xxvii). There, Dr. Silkworth writes:

"On the other hand - and strange as this may seem to those who do not understand - once a psychic change has occurred, the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol, the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules."(A.A., p. xxvii, para. 1, lines 1-7)

What are these simple rules? They are: "Trust in God and clean house" plus "Help others." If we follow these guidelines, we will receive the ultimate reward - a spiritual awakening.

Last week we started on our journey to this spiritual awakening by taking Step One. We conceded to our innermost selves we were powerless over alcohol, that is, we were alcoholics.

Will those of you who have completed Step One please stand. These are the newcomers who either took the First Step during last weeks Beginners' Meeting or with their "sponsor" or sharing partner during the week. (Optional: Also, will those who took the First Step with us earlier tonight, please stand.)

Thank you. Please be seated. We commend you for admitting you have a problem. As the "Big Book" says, "This is the first step in recovery." Your admission is a major achievement, since most alcoholics live in total denial they have a drinking problem.

II

We are now ready to proceed.

Step Two: Came to Believe that Power Greater than Ourselves Could Restore us to Sanity

Now that we have admitted we are alcoholics, let's look at what we have to do in order to recover. In the fourth paragraph on page 44(Big Book), we learn:

"If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could will these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshaled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly."

What is it going to take to find this power? The answer is in the back of the "Big Book" within Appendix II. Starting with the second paragraph on page 570, we find:

"Most emphatically we wish to say that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience can recover, provided he does not close his mind to all spiritual concepts. He can only be defeated by an attitude of intolerance or belligerent denial. We find that no one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. Willingness, honesty and open mindedness are the essentials of recovery. But these are indispensable."

The "Big Book" authors tell us it is our arrogance and our shortsightedness that keep us in the darkness and block us from the "Sunlight of the Spirit."

III

Bill W., our New York City co-founder, had a great deal of difficulty accepting this spiritual solution to alcoholism. In "Bill's Story" he describes how he "came to believe."

In late November 1934, Ebby T. visits Bill at his Brooklyn New York home. It is during this visit that Bill first learns about a God of his own understanding. Let's pick up the story in the first paragraph on page 12(Big Book).

As we mentioned last week, Ebby is one of Bill's high school friends and a former drinking companion. Ebby has been sober in the Oxford Group for several months. He tells Bill his life has changed as the result of practicing the Oxford Group Four Spiritual Activities. These are: Surrender, Sharing, Restitution and Guidance.

Bill becomes quite distressed when Ebby starts talking about God. However, he does listen because he realizes Ebby's life has changed - he is sober for the first time in many years.

"Despite the living example of my friend there remained in me the vestiges of my old prejudice. The word God still aroused a certain antipathy. When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me this feeling was intensified. I didn't like the idea. I could go for such conceptions as Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heavens, however loving His sway might be. I have since talked with scores of men who felt the same way." (A.A., p.12, para.1 lines 1-10)

Then Ebby presents Bill with a revolutionary concept:

"My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, 'Why don't you choose your own conception of God?' That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last. It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning. I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of complete willingness I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would!" (A.A., p.12, para.2, lines 1-3; para.3, lines 1-3; para.4, lines 1-6)

This is how Bill started on his spiritual journey to a God of his own understanding and lasting sobriety. It all began with Bill's willingness to believe.

IV

Now, let's look at how the "Big Book" authors describe God. In the middle of page 46, they ask us to set aside any contempt we might have for spiritual principles and consider our own concept of God. If we do, we will begin to realize there just might be some validity to the A.A. spiritual solution for the alcohol problem. Starting with the third line in the first paragraph, they write:

"....We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that power, which is God." (A.A., p.46, para. 1, lines 3-8)

Basically, the "Big Book" authors tell us it is impossible to define God. We have to stop trying to comprehend God with our mind and start accepting God with our heart. In the first paragraph on page 47, they explain to us that:

"When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you will find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So, we used our own conception, however limited it was."(A.A., p.47, para.1, lines 1-13)

Sometimes we have to take our lives right to the brink of disaster and look death squarely in the eye before we are willing to acknowledge the presence of God. But there is hope even for the most stubborn of us. Starting with the seventh line down from the top of page 48, the "Big Book" authors state that most of us eventually become "teachable":

"...Faced with alcoholic destruction, we soon become as open minded on spiritual matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect alcohol was a great persuader. It finally beat us into a state of reasonableness. Sometimes this was a tedious process; we hope no one else will be prejudiced for as long as some of us were."(A.A., p.48, lines 7-13)

In the third paragraph on page 52, the authors make a powerful case for the existence of God:

"When we saw others solve their problems by a simple reliance upon the Spirit of the Universe, we had to stop doubting the power of God. Our ideas did not work. But the God idea did."(A.A., p52, para. 3, lines 1-4)

Once again we need to make a decision. We have to decide whether or not we believe in a Creator - a Spirit of the Universe - a God of our understanding. In the second paragraph on page 53, the "Big Book" authors write:

"When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn't. What was our choice to be?"(A.A., p.53, para. 2, lines 1-5)

V

Now its time to choose. Are we willing to concede that there is a Power greater than ourselves? If we are, we're ready to take the Second Step. In the second paragraph on page 47, we find the directions:

"We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. 'Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?' As soon as a man can say that he does believe, or is willing to believe, we emphatically assure him that he is on his way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built." (A.A., p.47, para. 2, lines 1-8)

At this point in the book, if we were at a 'Beginners Meeting', they would follow the following suggested format:

Let's see who is ready to proceed? Will the newcomers who have completed Step One please stand. This is the Second Step question:

"DO I NOW BELIEVE, OR AM I WILLING TO BELIEVE, THAT THERE IS A POWER GREATER THAN MYSELF?"

Please answer, one at a time, "yes" or "no." After you have answered, please be seated. [Have each newcomer answer the question]

Thank you.

Those of you who answered "yes" to this question have completed Step Two. Now lets move on to the Third Step.

Page 71 of the "Back to Basics" booklet reads:-

Step 3 Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

I

This step begins with the third paragraph on page 60. How do we know that? Well, in this case, the "Big Book" authors tell us:

"Being convinced, we were at Step Three,..." (A.A., p. 60, para. 3, line 1)

Convinced of what? If we've taken the Second Step, we believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. But, even though we may believe that God is the answer, this doesn't necessarily mean we are going to seek this solution. In order to recover, we must make a decision to put this Power to work in our lives.

On pages 62 and 63, the "Big Book" authors show us how to become God directed rather than self-directed. But first, they describe how operating on self-will has kept us separated from God. In the fourth paragraph on page 60, they explain that, when we live on self-will, we are like actors trying to control every detail of a play:

"The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way."(A.A., p.60, para. 4, lines 1-8)

Does this sound familiar? At one time or another, haven't we all tried to convince those around us they would be much better off if they just did things our way? Attempting to control others is the epitome of selfishness.

II

In the first paragraph on page 62, the authors declare that it is this selfish, self-centeredness that has gotten us into trouble. We need to take responsibility for our selfishness and ask God to remove this shortcoming from our lives:

"Selfishness -- self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt. So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid."(A.A. p. 62, para. 1, lines 1-8; para. 2, lines 1-8)

Then in the third paragraph on page 62, the authors tell us what happens once we rid ourselves of this selfishness:

"This is the how and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our director. He is the Principal; we are His children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom. When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well."(A.A. p.62, para. 3, lines 1-8; p.63, para. 1, lines 1-4)

Now we know our place in God's Universe. Contrary to what we may have thought in the past, the whole world does not revolve around us. Once we step aside and put God in the center, we are amazed at how much better our lives become.

III

Realizing there is a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of God Consciousness. As we become aware of our Creator, our lives change. Starting with the fifth line down from the top of page 63, the authors explain this

awareness:

"Established on such a footing, we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn."(A.A. p.63, para. 1, lines 5-12)

We have been delivered from the gates of Hell, and we have come back to tell what it was like. It isn't a pretty picture. But, now we realize we never have to go back there again, as long as we remember Who's in charge.

IV

It is decision time once again. The "Big Book" authors tell us we are now ready to take the Third Step. In the third paragraph on page 63, they provide us with the directions.

"We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step, with an understanding person, such as our wife, best friend, or spiritual adviser. But it is better to meet God alone than with one who might misunderstand. The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation. This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once.(A.A. p.63, para. 3, lines, 1-9)

We are so fortunate that, in the years since the "Big Book" was written, the fellowship has grown to where very few, if any, newcomers have to take the Third Step alone. We're here to take this monumental step with you.

Although they say the wording is optional, the authors do provide us with a prayer we can use to complete the Third Step.

The prayer is in the middle of page 63. Starting with the second line in the second paragraph, it reads:

"... God, I offer myself to Thee--to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory of them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy way of life. May I do Thy will always!"(A.A., p.63, para. 2, lines 2-8)

We would like each of you who is ready to take the third step to read along with us a second time.

LET'S READ THE THIRD STEP PRAYER TOGETHER. [read the prayer a second time.]

According to the "Big Book" authors, we have completed Step Three. Even though we've spent a considerable amount of time on the first three steps, we have only made a series of decisions. Now we need to take some specific actions that will carry us the rest of the way to God.

Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

I

In the fourth paragraph on page 63, the "Big Book" authors tell us what we need to do now that we've made our decision to proceed.

"Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted. Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us."(A.A., p.63, para.4, lines 1-2; p.64, lines 1-5)

Please note the authors say at once. They tell us we need to take the Fourth Step immediately after we complete the Third Step. WE have to get rid of those things which have been blocking us off from God or else our initial contact with our Creator won't last.

So, now we are going to establish a direct line of communication with God eliminating those aspects of our personalities which have kept us in the dark. The "Big Book" authors say that liquor is but a symptom. Sure, alcohol has cut us off from God, but once we stop drinking, we're still separated from our Creator because of our character liabilities. Now, it's time to look at these shortcomings by making an inventory.

The "Big Book" authors start by comparing a personal inventory to a business inventory. In the first paragraph on page 64, they write:

"Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory, This was Step Four. A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods; to get rid of them promptly and without regret."(A.A., p.64, para. 1, lines 1-7)

So, we are going to conduct the equivalent of a commercial inventory on our lives. This implies we are going to look at our assets and liabilities. That's what a commercial inventory is all about. It's an examination of what is working and what is not working in our lives. It provides us with the opportunity to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.

Then, the authors tell us exactly what we have to do in order to conduct a Fourth Step inventory:

"We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations."(A.A., p.64, para. 2, lines 1-6)

II

Before we get into the details on how to complete this Step, we want to emphasize a few things. First, that there is no right or wrong way to do this inventory. There are several assets and liabilities checklists in use today. You can use any one or all of them.

Second, the assets and liabilities checklist on page 64 precedes the three column inventory described on page 65. Because this examination of "the stock in trade" comes first, we assume the "Big Book" authors are asking us to complete the simple and straight-forward "commercial inventory" before attempting the much more difficult example on the following page.

Third, the assets and liabilities checklist has been used for years by Dr. Bob, our Akron, Ohio co-founder, and by many of our AA pioneers. Dr. Bob believes that initially, newcomers should be taken through a simplified version of the Steps. Later on, they can work the program in more detail.

When we "Keep it simple," the newcomer can easily grasp our life saving message, experience the miracle of recovery, and grow into the "Fellowship of the Spirit" by working with others. Each time the new member either takes the Steps or helps someone else through the Steps, he or she conducts another inventory. This keeps the person actively involved in our life-saving program of recovery. He or she learns to rely on God's will rather than self-will to solve problems.

Dr. Bob takes newcomers through the Steps as quickly as possible. In many instances, he does this during the person's three to five-day stay at St. Thomas hospital in Akron, Ohio. Thousands of alcoholics have recovered by following Dr. Bob's "Keep it simple" approach.

The "Big Book" authors also tell us to take the Steps quickly. We must discover "the truth about the stock-in-trade" in order to remove the behaviors that have cut us off from the Spirit of the Universe. In the third paragraph on page 65, they write:

"We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were finished we considered it carefully."(A.A., p.65, para.3, lines 1-3)

Please note that the authors ask us to be thorough and, in the very next sentence, they tell us what to do when we are finished. Since this is all in one paragraph, we assume they are asking us to complete this inventory in one sitting.

Keep in mind this is only a suggestion. You can spend as much time on this inventory as you wish, just as long as you complete it and discuss it with your "sponsor" or sharing partner before our next session.

III

Now, let's look at what we put on paper. From pages 64 to 71, the authors provide us with a list of shortcomings we need to eliminate and a list of assets we need to accentuate. On page 64, they ask us to examine our resentments:

"Resentment is the 'number one' offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease,... In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry."(A.A., p.64, para. 3, lines 1-3, and 6-9)

In the first paragraph on page 66, the authors emphasize that our resentments keep us separated from our Creator. We must eliminate them if we are to have a spiritual awakening:

"It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worth while. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die."(A.A., p.66, para.1, lines 1-10)

Then, in the second paragraph on page 67, the authors instruct us to look at our part in each situation to see if we need to make an amends:

"Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's. When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight."(A.A., p.67, para. 2, lines 1-11)

Let's look at the third sentence again. It reads, "Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened?" These behaviors are based on self-will. In addition, they are the opposites of the Four Standards of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness, and Love which the Oxford Group uses as a test of God's will.

When Bill W., Dr. Bob and the other "Big Book" authors were members of the Oxford Group, they tested everything they thought about, said or did. Now, they are asking us to do the same thing - test our actions. We need to know which path we're on. Are we living in the solution and "walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe," or are we still sinking deeper and deeper into "that bitter morass of self pity?" It is our selfish, self-centeredness that keeps us blocked from our Creator and prevents us from finding the spiritual solution to alcoholism.

We can use either the A.A. test for self-will or the Oxford Group test for God's will to determine if an amends needs to be made:

THE ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS TEST FOR SELF-WILL(LEFT COLUMN) AND THE OXFORD GROUP TEST FOR GOD'S WILL(RIGHT COLUMN):

SELFISH(NESS)-----UNSELFISHNESS
DISHONEST(Y)-----HONESTY
SELF-SEEKING-----PURITY
FRIGHTENED-----LOVES

So, as part of our inventory, we use the attributes of Selfishness, Dishonesty, Self-seeking, and Frightened as a means for separating self-will from God's will. In Step Eleven, we'll learn how to use this same test to determine if what we have written during our morning meditation has come from God or self.

IV

Next, the authors ask us to look at our fears. In the first paragraph on page 68, they write:

"We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them. We asked ourselves why we had them. Wasn't it because self-reliance failed us? Self-reliance was good as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough. Some of us once had great self-confidence, but it didn't fully solve the fear problem, or any other."(A.A., p. 68, para. 1, lines 1-7)

In the next paragraph on page 68, they inform us that we will lose our fears if we trust our Creator. If we act according to God's will rather than according to self-will, "great events will come to pass":

"Perhaps there is a better way - we think so. For we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity."(A.A., p.68, para. 2, lines 1-7)

In the first paragraph on page 69, the authors mention some additional character liabilities we need to address. They also ask us to make a list of those we have harmed. This will become our amends list - the people to whom we need to make restitution:

"We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it."(A.A., p.69, para. 1, lines 1-6)

V

The "Big Book" authors have told us several times now that our inventory needs to be written. So far, so good. But, now we need to decide who does the writing.

In "Bill's Story," our New York City co-founder, Bill W., describes how he completed his inventory. On page 13, starting with the fifth line in the second paragraph, he states:

"I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch."(A.A., p. 13, para. 2, lines 5-7)

Bill doesn't say "I ruthlessly wrote down my sins." All he does is acknowledges that he has some faults.

In the third paragraph on page 13, Bill describes how he discussed his inventory with his sharing partner:

"My schoolmate visited me, and I fully acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies. We made a list of people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment."(A.A., p.13, para. 3, lines 1-4)

Here again, Bill doesn't say "My schoolmate visited me and I read him my inventory of resentments and fears." He also doesn't say, "I made a list of people....." Rather, Bill writes, "We made a list of people..."

So, together Bill and Ebby made an amends list. Let's think about this for a minute. Bill is in Towns Hospital in December 1934, being withdrawn from alcohol for the third time that year. He is suffering from delirium tremens - he is a very sick man. Ebby has been sober for several months. Whom do you think did the writing? (It wasn't Bill!)

VI

We are now going to describe the assets and liabilities checklist in detail. There are several lists to choose from. One can be found in the Washington, DC pamphlet we discussed last week. Another has been published in the June 1946 issue of The A.A. Grapevine. A third is described in a book distributed by a Minneapolis, Minnesota A.A. group.

Of the three checklists, we believe the one described in the Washington, DC pamphlet is the easiest to understand. Therefore we will use this one as our guide for the Fourth Step. We hope our explanation of this checklist will show you just how simple and straightforward this Step really is.

The Washington, DC pamphlet contains specific instructions for taking a Fourth Step inventory:

"Some, in error, think the inventory is a lot of unpaid debts, plus a list of unmade apologies. our trouble goes much deeper. We will find the root of our troubles lies in - Resentments - False Pride - Envy - Jealousy -Selfishness and many other things. Laziness is an important one. In other words we are making an inventory of our character - our attitude toward others - our very way of living."(A.A. - An Interpretation of our TwelveSteps, p. 15)

The character liabilities mentioned in the Washington, DC pamphlet are Resentments, False Pride, Envy, Jealousy, Selfishness and Laziness. To these we have added Dishonesty and Fear from the A.A. test for self-will found on page 67 of the "Big Book."

We are going to describe some of these liabilities in a way that we hope will give you a clearer understanding as to what the words mean.

Let's start with Resentment. When we are angry or bitter toward someone for an extended period of time over some real or imagined insult, we are harboring resentment. It is a hostile or indignant attitude in response to an alleged affront or personal injury.

False Pride is either feeling better than or feeling less than someone else. Feelings of superiority include prejudice about race, education or religious beliefs, or sarcasm-putting someone else down to make us feel better about ourselves. Feelings of inferiority include self pity which is being distressed or unhappy about our own lives, or low self-esteem - the lack of self-worth or self-respect.

Envy has to do with things - wanting someone else's possessions.

Jealousy has to do with people - being suspicious of a rival or doubting the faithfulness of a friend.

Selfishness is concern only for ourselves, our own advantage or pleasure, without regard for, or at the expense of, others. It's a belief that, "It's all about me" rather than " How can I best serve Thee - Thy will (not mine) be done."

Laziness means lacking the will or the desire to work. This includes the avoidance of, or the slowness in completing, a task or assignment.

Dishonesty is usually thought of in terms of stealing - taking something that doesn't belong to us. It also includes lying to or withholding the truth from another person.

Fear is being afraid of losing something we have or not getting something we want. It manifests itself in many ways such as phobia, terror, panic, anxiety, uneasiness or worry.

So much for the liabilities side of the ledger. Now, what about the assets? The "Big Book" authors list assets throughout Chapter 5. Starting with the third line down from the top of page 67, they describe how we should react to those who have wronged us. In essence, they tell us to forgive them:

"We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, 'This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to Him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.' "

On page 70, starting with the second line in the third paragraph, they provide us with several more assets while summarizing the inventory process:

"We have listed and analyzed our resentments. We have begun to comprehend their futility and their fatality. We have commenced to see their terrible destructiveness. We have begun to learn tolerance, patience and good will toward all men, even our enemies..."(A.A., p. 70, para. 3, lines 2-7)

Additional assets are listed in the Washington, DC pamphlet and the A.A. Grapevine article. Some of these are Forgiveness, Humility, Contentment, Trust, Generosity, Activity, Honesty and Love.

VII

We have now looked at both sides of the ledger. Our inventory consists of a list of liabilities to watch for and a list of assets to strive for.

We have put together a form that we hope will simplify the inventory process even further. It has the liabilities on the left side and the assets on the right side of the sheet. This is the same format used in the June 1946 issue of The A.A. Grapevine. All we have done is add vertical lines so you can write, across the top of the page, the items you need to address.

To show you just how easy it is to do a Fourth Step inventory, we're going to take you through an example. In this case, we'll assume the "sponsor" does the writing. O.K., let's begin.

The sponsor starts at the top of the checklist. He or she writes down some of the people, institutions and principles that a newcomer usually has to inventory. These can include parents, spouses, children, siblings, relatives, friends, co-workers, government officials, prisons, sanitariums, God, religion, etc. The "Sponsor writes down others as they come up during the session.

The "sponsor" asks the newcomer to look over the list and put check marks next to the character liabilities that apply. If the newcomer isn't able to do this, the "sponsor" starts asking questions, filling in the checklist as he or she goes along.

In our example, the "sponsor" opens the sharing session with, "Let's look at your mother. Are you angry or bitter toward her?" The "sponsor" proceeds down the list of liabilities asking questions such as, "Do you feel better than or less than your Mother?" "Are you envious of any of the things she owns?" "Are you jealous of her relationship with any other family member?" "On occasion, do you think only about yourself rather than about her needs?" "Have you ever avoided doing something she has asked you to do?" "Have you ever stolen anything from her or lied to her?" "Are you afraid of her?"

If the newcomer answers "yes" to any of these questions, the "sponsor" asks the newcomer to explain the circumstances that prompted the positive response. Together, they decide if the newcomer needs to make amends for any of the things the newcomer has done.

In this example, the "sponsor" and the newcomer decide that the newcomer needs to make amends to his mother for being selfish and lazy. The "sponsor" puts checkmarks in the boxes to the right of Selfishness and Laziness, under the heading of Mother.

The "sponsor" and the newcomer proceed across the checklist, discussing the people, institutions and principles that apply. The "sponsor" makes checkmarks until the newcomer has described and agreed to make amends for many of his or her "grosser handicaps."

Keep in mind that it is not necessary for the newcomer to describe every resentment, or act of selfishness, or each person he or she has ever lied to in order for the inventory to be thorough. The objective is to get to "causes and conditions." Sometimes it takes only a few incidents to reveal those characteristics of self that have kept the newcomer blocked from an intimate, two-way relationship with the "One who has all power."

In the case where the newcomer has been abused, the "sponsor" discusses the situation with compassion, assuring the newcomer that no amends need be made under these circumstances. The "sponsor" asks the newcomer to consider forgiving the abuser so he or she can be released from the shame and guilt that accompanies this kind of behavior.

Then, the "sponsor" and newcomer look at the assets side of the ledger. The assets that are opposite the liabilities with the least checkmarks are the positive characteristics that the newcomer already has. Those assets opposite the liabilities with the most checkmarks are the qualities that will be strengthened as the newcomer makes the necessary amends.

In our example, the "sponsor" and the newcomer have put together a list with only a few checkmarks next to Jealousy, Envy, Laziness and Dishonesty and numerous checkmarks next to Resentment, False Pride, Selfishness and Fear.

In our example, the "sponsor" summarizes the sharing session by saying, "This inventory shows that, for the most part, you are a contented, trusting, hard-working and honest person. In addition, you will become more forgiving, humble, and unselfish and loving as you make amends for your anger, sarcasm, self-centeredness and anxiety."

The "Big Book" authors tell us this on page 70. Starting with the fourth line in the first paragraph, they write:

"If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson. If we are not sorry, and our conduct continues to harm others, we are quite sure to drink. We are not theorizing. These are facts out of our experience."(A.A., p.70, para. 1, lines 4-10)

VIII

So, it is time to make a searching and fearless moral inventory - time to clean up the wreckage of the past so we can get closer to the Spirit of the Universe. We have copies of the assets and liabilities checklist for those who would like to use this format for their Fourth Step inventory.

We have completed our presentation of the Fourth Step, but before we end this session, we need to discuss one more detail - the person with whom we share our inventory.

Step Five reads: "Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

According to the "Big Book" authors, we must talk over our assets and liabilities checklists with someone.

That person can be the member of A.A. who is "sponsoring" you through these sessions, but it doesn't have to be. The "Big Book" authors provide us with other options.

Starting with the Fourth paragraph on page 73, they give directions on how to choose the person with whom we share our inventory. Please keep in mind that the "Big Book" was written before any type of formalized sponsorship had been established. The authors do not use the word "sponsor" anywhere in the text of the book. However, they do establish some guidelines regarding the person with whom we review our assets and liabilities:

"We must be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world. Rightly and naturally, we think well before we choose the person or persons with whom to take this intimate and confidential step. Those of us belonging to a religious denomination which requires confession must, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty it is to receive it. Though we have no religious connection, we may still do well to talk with someone ordained by an established religion.....If we cannot or would rather not do this, we search our acquaintance for a close mouthed, understanding friend. Perhaps our doctor or psychologist will be the person."(A.A., p.73, para. 4, line 1; p.74, lines 1-9; para.1, lines 1-4)

Therefore you can share your inventory with any number of people. For those who are still uncertain who that person should be, have your "sponsor" or sharing partner help you decide.

If you still have doubts about the value of the Fourth Step, let us read to you what the "Big Book" authors have to say. In the fourth paragraph on page 70, they make it clear that if we admit our wrongs and are willing to set such matters right, God will take away our difficulties:

"In this book you read again and again that faith did for us what we could not do for ourselves. We hope you are convinced now that God can remove whatever self-will has blocked you off from Him."(A.A., p.70, para. 4, line 1; p.71, lines 1-3)

Please let God guide you through the inventory process. If you do, you'll find the Fourth and Fifth Steps simple and straight forward. Just take the time to complete one of the checklists, either by yourself or with your "sponsor" or sharing partner. Then talk over your list with another person.

As we have already said, there is no right or wrong way to do the Fourth Step. Just do it.

B2B Step 5

I

We are now entering the phase of the program where more and more actions are required. These actions produce results. Many of these results are in the form of promises which, as our lives change, become and integral part of our spiritual being.

If our lives didn't get better, why would we want to stay sober? If all we had to look forward to was restlessness, irritability and discontentment, why do the work? A.A. offers so much more than just freedom from alcohol. We have found a new way of living – far more beautiful than anything we ever could have imagined. That's why we take the Steps, and that's why we take them again and again.

Before we move on to Steps Six, Seven, Eight and Nine, let's review what the "Big Book" authors say about the Fifth Step. This is the Step during which God reveals to us, through another person, those characteristics of self, which had been blocking us from the "sunlight of the Spirit."

Step 5 Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Starting with the ninth line in the second paragraph on page 72, the "Big Book" authors tell us why we need to admit our shortcomings to another person:

"...The best reason first: If we skip this vital step we may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only thought they had lost their egoism and fear; they only thought they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone all their life story."(A.A., p.72, para. 2, lines 9-13; p.73, lines 1-10)

Once again, the "Big Book" authors instruct us to take "stock" in other words, conduct a commercial inventory on our lives. A commercial inventory consists of an assets and liabilities checklist. They even mention several of the assets and liabilities we are to look at.

We share our inventories because we are great at self-deception. Aren't we the ones who used to say we didn't have a drinking problem? Didn't we tell ourselves over and over that we were doing fine as we were sinking deeper and deeper into the abyss of alcoholism?

Since we're not good judges of character, especially our own, we confide in someone else. Only another person can see us as we really are.

As we discussed last week, we can share our inventory with any number of people. Some of those mentioned on page 74 of the "Big Book" are church leaders, doctors, psychologists and friends.

The person we choose has to be closemouthed, trustworthy and supportive. He or she must never discuss our inventory with anyone else. Starting with the seventh line in the second paragraph on page 74, the "Big Book" authors write:

"It is important that he be able to keep a confidence; that he fully understand and approve what we are driving at; that he will not try to change our plan."(A.A., p.74, para. 2, lines 7-9; p.75, line 1)

II

The "Big Book" authors give us specific instructions for taking the Fifth Step. In the first paragraph on page 75, they tell us that, as soon as we decide who is to listen to our inventory, we take action immediately:

"When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time. We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk. We explain to our partner what we are about to do and why we have to do it. He should realize that we are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by our confidence." (A.A., p.75, para. 1, lines 1-8)

In the second paragraph on page 75, the "Big Book" authors provide us with more directions.

"We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past." (A.A., p.75, para. 2, lines 1-2)

Then, they announce that after we have shared our inventories, we will be rewarded. Starting with the second line in the second paragraph on page 75, the "Big Book" authors provide us with a list of benefits we receive as the direct result of taking this Step:

"...Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe." (A.A., p.75, para. 2, lines 2-11)

We are now well on our way toward recovering from alcoholism. The "Big Book" authors state we are in the process of having a spiritual experience and as a result, our obsession to drink is removed.

Think about how these promises are coming true in your lives. They certainly have come true in ours.

In the third paragraph on page 75, the "Big Book" authors give us specific directions on what to do after we have finished sharing our inventories:

"Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page, which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimmed on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand?" (A.A., p.75, para. 3, lines 1-12)

The "Big Book" authors instruct us to review the first Five Steps to make sure we haven't omitted anything. If you have done this, you are ready to proceed to the Sixth Step.

Step 6 Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

In this Step, the "Big Book" authors have us answer a simple question. Starting with the third line in the first paragraph on page 76, they ask:

"Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable? Can He now take them all - every one? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing." (A.A., p.76, para. 1, lines 3-7)

So, according to the "Big Book" authors, it is decision time once again. We realize they want you to take your Sixth Step on the same evening you share your Fourth Step with your "sponsor." In case your "sponsor" didn't direct you to page 76 on the "Big Book", we'll take you there now. If you have already completed the Sixth Step, we ask that you take it again right now with the Group.

During the Fifth Step, we identified our character defects using the assets and liabilities checklists we discussed last week. In the Sixth Step, we make the preparations necessary to turn these shortcomings over to God.

Let's start with a moment of silence so we can ask God to remove the liabilities that we found were blocking us when we shared inventories. These are the items on the left side of the assets and liabilities checklist that have checkmarks next to them. If we are still holding on to some of these shortcomings, we pray for the willingness to let go of them.

(A moment of silence)

Now, will the newcomers who have completed Steps One through Five please stand. This is the Sixth Step question:

"Are you now ready to have God remove from you all the things that you have admitted are objectionable?"

Please answer "yes" or "no"

Thank you.

Those of you who answered "yes" to this question have completed Step Six and are ready to proceed to the Seventh Step.

Step 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

This Step is straightforward. It consists of a prayer in which we ask God to remove our liabilities and strengthen our assets so we can be of maximum service to all.

This prayer is found in the second paragraph on page 76, it reads:

“My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character, which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding, Amen.”

We would like each of you who are ready to take the Seventh Step to read the prayer along with us a second time.

Let's read the Seventh Step Prayer together.

[Read the prayer a second time]

According to the “Big Book” authors, we have completed Step Seven.

Now, it is time to clear away the wreckage of our past. We do this by making amends or restitution.

Step 8. Made a list of persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

The "Big Book" authors state, "made a list." Do we need to make this list? Actually, no! We made our list as part of our Fourth Step. In the third paragraph on page 76, the "Big Book" authors confirm this:

"Now we need more action, without which we find that "Faith without works is dead." Let's look at Steps Eight and Nine. We have a list of all person we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory." (A.A., p.76, para. 3, lines 1-5)

That's why we hold on to our Fourth Step inventory. It contains our Eighth Step amends list. For those of you who used our assets and liabilities checklist, your amends list consists of the names at the top of the sheet that have one or more checkmarks under them.

We would like to congratulate the newcomers who made an amends list as part of your Fourth Step inventory. According to the "Big Book" authors you have completed Step Eight.

Step 9. Made direct amends to such people, wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

I

The amends process is explained in detail on pages 76 through 83. On page 76, starting with the sixth line in the third paragraph, the "Big Book" authors tell us what to do:

"Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris, which has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves. If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes. Remember it was agreed at the beginning we would go to any lengths for victory over alcohol." (A.A., p.76, para. 3, lines 6-13)

In the fourth paragraph on page 76, the "Big Book" authors provide us with some insight as to how to approach some of those to whom we owe an amends:

"Probably there are still some misgivings. As we look over the list of business acquaintances and friends we have hurt, we may feel diffident about going to some of them on a spiritual basis. Let us be reassured. To some people we need not, and probably should not emphasize the spiritual feature on our first approach. We might prejudice them. At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order. But this is not an end in itself. Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."(A.A., p.76, para. 4, lines 1-6; p.77, lines 1-4)

In the last sentence of this paragraph, the authors clearly state our purpose for living. They tell us we are here to serve God and our fellows.

Then on page 77, they ask us to let our actions, rather than our words, demonstrate to others that we have changed. Starting with the fourth line, they write:

"It is seldom wise to approach an individual, who still smarts from our injustice to him, and announce that we have gone religious. In the prize ring, this would be called leading with the chin. Why lay ourselves open to being branded fanatics or religious bores? We may kill a future opportunity to carry a beneficial message. But our man is sure to be impressed with a sincere desire to set right the wrong. He is going to be more interested in our demonstration of good will than in our talk of spiritual discoveries."(A.A., p.77, lines 4-14)

One of the most difficult amends to make is to someone we genuinely don't like. But, whether we like them or not, we must proceed. Starting with the ninth line in the first paragraph on page 77, we find:

"Nevertheless, with a person we dislike, we take the bit in the teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend, but we find it much more beneficial to us. We go to him in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill feeling and expressing our regret."(A.A., p.77, para. 1, lines 9-14)

In the second paragraph on page 77, the authors even provide us with instructions on what to say:

"Under no condition do we criticize such a person or argue. Simply we tell him that we will never get over drinking until we have done our utmost to straighten out the past. We are there to sweep off our side of the street, realizing that nothing worthwhile can be accomplished until we do so, never trying to tell him what he should do. His faults are not discussed. We stick to our own. If our manner is calm, frank, and open, we will be gratified with the result."(A.A., p.77, para. 2, lines 1-5; p.78, lines 1-4)

II

The authors explain what to do about our debts. We may not like the sacrifice required to make good on our bills, but sacrifice we must. The process forces us to rely on God for guidance, which takes us out of self-will and into God's will. Under god's direction we find it much easier to make restitution than we ever thought possible. In the second paragraph on page 78, they write:

"Most alcoholics owe money. We do not judge our creditors. Telling them what we are trying to do, we make no bones about our drinking; they usually know it anyway, whether we think so or not. Nor are we afraid of disclosing our alcoholism on the theory it may cause financial harm. Approached in this way, the most ruthless creditor will sometimes surprise us. Arranging the best deal we can we let these people know we are sorry. Our drinking has made us slow to pay. We must lose fear of creditors no

matter how far we have to go, for we are liable to drink if we are afraid to face them.”(A.A., p.78, para. 2, lines 1-12)

Keep in mind that courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is facing the fear and walking through it.

In the first paragraph on page 79, the “Big Book” authors again instruct us to ask God for guidance. This reliance upon God is essential, if we are to outgrow the fears that have separated us from our Creator:

“Although these reparations take innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding. Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything.” (A.A., p.79, para. 2, lines 1-9)

The “Big Book” authors suggest we ask others for help before we make some of our more difficult amends. We need direction, preferably from someone who understands the inventory and restitution process. We must make sure we do not create further harm as we clean up our side of the street. In the first paragraph on page 80, they write:

“Before taking drastic action which might implicate other people, we secure their consent. If we have obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked God to help and the drastic step is indicated, we must not shrink.”(A.A., p.80, para. 1, lines 1-5)

In the first paragraph on page 82, we are yet again instructed to ask God for guidance, as we make good on our past misdeeds:

“Perhaps there are some cases where the utmost frankness is demanded. No outsider can appraise such an intimate situation. It may be that both will decide that the way of good sense and loving-kindness is to let bygones by bygones. Each might pray about it, having the other one’s happiness uppermost in mind.” (A.A., p.82, para. 1, lines 1-6)

This is an example of how we must be tactful and considerate of others as we make our amends. Nobody said it would be easy - it just has to be done.

III

Starting with the second line in the second paragraph on page 82, the “Big Book” authors state quite emphatically that stopping drinking is only the beginning. We must take additional action if we are to recover from alcoholism:

“Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that the only thing he needs to do is to keep sober. Certainly he must keep sober, for there will be no home if he doesn’t. But he is yet a long way from making good to the wife or parents whom for years he has so shockingly treated... The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough.” (A.A., p.82, para. 2, lines 2-7; para. 3, lines 1-6)

Not drinking is not enough. The “Big Book” authors make that quite clear. Starting with the first paragraph on page 83, they write:

“Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We must take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won’t fill the bill at all. We ought to sit down with the family and frankly analyse the past as we now see it, being very careful not to criticize them. Their defects may be glaring, but the chances are that our own actions are partly responsible. So we clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness and love. The spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it.”(A.A., p.83, para. 1, lines 1-10; para. 2, line 1)

Here we’re told that, in order to recover from alcoholism, we have to live the A.A. program. So, we don’t just take the Steps, we live the Steps, on a daily basis.

Then in the third paragraph on page 83, the authors give us directions on what to do if we can't make amends to someone face-to-face:

"There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could. Some people cannot be seen - we send them an honest letter." (A.A., p.83, para. 3, lines 1-5)

IV

The authors conclude the Ninth Step with another list of benefits. Starting with the fourth paragraph on page 83, they tell us precisely what is going to happen once we commence to clear away the wreckage of our past. They describe these benefits as promises. The "Big Book" is filled with promises. These are just a few of them:

"If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations, which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. (A.A., p.83, para.4, lines 1-5; p.84, lines 1-11)

What a message of hope! It is almost beyond comprehension that all of these wonderful events will "come to pass" if we just make amends to those whom we have harmed. But, they will happen – that's the guarantee.

Dr. Bob, our Akron, Ohio, co-founder; found that he could not stay sober until he made his amends. He accomplished this in one day. Starting with the first paragraph on page 156, we read about Dr. Bob's Ninth Step:

"One morning he took the bull by the horns and set out to tell those he feared what his trouble had been. He found himself surprisingly well received, and learned that many knew of his drinking. Stepping into his car; he made the rounds of people he had hurt. He trembled as he went about, for this might mean ruin, particularly to a person in his line of business.

At midnight he came home exhausted, but very happy. He has not had a drink since." (A.A., p.156, para. 1, lines 1-8; para. 2, lines 1-2)

This concludes our presentation of Step Nine. For the newcomers, part of your assignment for the next week is to start on your amends lists. If you are not sure how to proceed with a specific amends, ask your "sponsor" or sharing partner for help.

You have chosen to let God direct your lives. Now, you need to know how to maintain and expand this new God consciousness. You do this by living Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve on a daily basis.

The Tenth Step is a summary of Steps Four through Nine. The Eleventh Step shows us how to establish and maintain a conscious contact with God. The Twelfth Step tells us how to carry our life-saving message to others. Let's start with the Tenth Step.

Step 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

In Steps One, Two and Three, we made the decisions that put us on the spiritual path. In Steps Four through Nine, we took the actions necessary to remove those things, which had kept us separated from the God of our understanding. Now, we're ready to grow into the promised spiritual awakening.

The key to the Tenth Step is the word "continue." In the second paragraph on page 84, the "Big Book" authors emphasize the importance of continuing to take the Steps:

"This... brings us to Step Ten, which suggests we continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along. We vigorously commenced this way of living as we cleaned up the past. We have entered the world of the Spirit. Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime." (A.A., p.84, para. 2, lines 1-8)

In this paragraph, the authors tell us how to live, one day at a time. We call this our twenty-four-hour plan. We continue to take inventory, continue to make amends and continue to help others, every day.

Let's look at the third sentence in this paragraph again. It is very important. It reads, "We have entered the world of the Spirit."

This sentence contains an amazing revelation. Basically, the "Big Book" authors have just informed us that our lives have already changed as a result of taking Steps One through Nine. They state that we have already had a spiritual awakening.

How could that be? Well, it's very simple. There is no way a newcomer can get through these Steps alone. You have not only developed a belief in a God of your understanding, but you have come to rely upon this Power to help you through the inventory and restitution process. You are now living in the solution. Some of you may not realize it yet, but the "psychic change" has already occurred.

II

Starting with the eighth line in the second paragraph on page 84, the authors tell us precisely how to take a Tenth Step inventory:

"... Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help. Love and tolerance of others is our code." (A.A., p.84, para. 2, lines 8-14)

In this paragraph, the "Big Book" authors present the A.A. test for self-will a second time. (Recently)...we described how to use the test to check the liabilities side of our Fourth Step inventories to determine if we needed to make amends. In the Tenth Step, the authors ask us to apply the same test, with only minor variations, to our daily inventories. Here, they instruct us "to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment and fear."

The authors even provide us with specific instructions on how to rid ourselves of these self-centered behaviors. First, we must realize they are not consistent with God's plan for our lives. Next, we must take the actions necessary to move from self-will to God's will. We ask God to remove these shortcomings, we discuss them with our "sponsor" or sharing partner, and if necessary, we make restitution. Then we try to help someone else.

The "Big Book" authors state that if we use the A.A. test for self-will on a daily basis, God will remove our obsession to drink. This is another of the many promises we find throughout the text of the book.

III

The "Big Book" authors state that if we use the A.A. test for self-will on a daily basis, God will remove our obsession to drink. This is another of the many promises we find throughout the text of the book. In the third paragraph on page 84, they write:

"And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone - even alcohol. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward liquor has been given us without any thought or effort on our part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it; neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality - safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition."(A.A., p.84, para. 3, lines 1-4; p.85, lines 1-12)

How do we keep in fit spiritual condition? By taking a daily inventory. What is our reward? A daily reprieve.

The "Big Book" authors describe this daily reprieve in the first paragraph on page 85:

"It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. 'How can I best serve Thee - Thy will (not mine) be done.' " (A.A., p.85, para. 1, lines 1-8)

Another reward is God Consciousness - direct contact with the "Spirit of the Universe." In the second paragraph on page 85, the "Big Book" authors tell us:

"Much has already been said about receiving strength, inspiration, and direction from Him who has all knowledge and power. If we have carefully followed directions, we have begun to sense the flow of His Spirit into us. To some extent we have become God-conscious. We have begun to develop this vital sixth sense. But we must go further and that means more action."(A.A., p.85, para. 2, lines 1-8)

Once again, the authors maintain that our lives have changed – we've already experienced a spiritual awakening. They say we have become conscious of the Spirit within. This Spirit is now guiding our actions and expanding our power of perception.

IV

Now, its time to find out who is ready to proceed. The directions for taking the Tenth Step are found in the second paragraph on page 84. Starting with the second line, the "Big Book" authors write:

"...We continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along."(A.A., p.84, para. 2, lines 2-3)

Will the newcomers who have completed the first Eight Steps please answer the Tenth Step question?

Will you continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as you go along?

Please answer, one at a time, "yes" or "no."

Thank you.

Those of you who answered, "yes" to this question have completed Step Ten.

Now let's move on to the Eleventh Step.

Step 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.

The Eleventh Step begins at the bottom of page 85 and extends through page 88. But, as we've already seen, the "Big Book" authors have been writing about prayer and meditation throughout the book.

In the third paragraph on page 85, we find:

"Step Eleven suggests prayer and meditation. We shouldn't be shy on this matter of prayer. Better men than we are using it constantly. It works, if we have the proper attitude and work at it."(A.A., p.85, para.3, lines 1-2; p.86, lines 1-2)

When the authors say, "it works," they're telling us that two-way prayer puts us directly in contact with our Creator. Hopefully that's what each of us has been doing this past week - praying and listening to the God of our understanding.

Starting with the second line down from the top of page 86, they make this statement:

"It would be easy to be vague about this matter. Yet, we believe we can make some definite and valuable suggestions."(A.A., p.86, lines 2-4)

Then the "Big Book" authors provide us with step-by-step instructions of how to practice two-way prayer. They tell us what to do at night, in the morning, and during the day.

At night, we review the day's activities. Once again, the authors ask us to use the A.A. test for self-will to judge our actions.

In the first paragraph on page 86, they write:

"When we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves, which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Were we thinking of ourselves most of the time? Or were we thinking of what we could do for others, of what we could pack into the stream of life?"(A.A., p.86, para. 1, lines 1-9)

This paragraph contains the third reference to the A.A. test for self-will. The "Big Book" authors once again have made minor changes to the test they presented to us in the Fourth and Tenth Steps. Nevertheless, it is still the opposite of the Oxford Group test for God's will:

The Alcoholics Anonymous Test for self-will

Resentful
Selfish(ness)
Dishonest(y)
Afraid (or Fear)

The Oxford Group Test for God's will

Purity
Unselfishness
Honesty
Love

This is the same test we will use during our morning meditation to check our thoughts.

II

In the second paragraph on page 86, the "Big Book" authors provide us with directions for conducting a morning "quiet time":

"On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives." (A.A., p.86, para. 2, lines 1-5)

Let's look at the sentence beginning with, "Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking." Please concentrate on these words. They are very important. "Before we begin," - before we begin what? Before we begin listening to God. How do we know that we're supposed to listen to God? Because, right afterward, it says, "we ask God to direct our thinking." If we ask God to direct our thinking, doesn't it stand to reason that our next thoughts are going to be from God? What do we do with these thoughts? We write them down.

Although this action is not specifically mentioned in the "Big Book" it is an essential part of the meditation process. Much of the Oxford Group literature, which was used to write the "Big Book," contains references to written guidance. A passage from page 68 of "What is the Oxford Group?" illustrates the value of writing down what we hear during our morning meditation:

"The Group advocates our use of a pencil and note-book so that we may record every God-given thought and idea that comes to us during our time alone with Him, that no detail, however small, may be lost to us and that we may not shirk the truth about ourselves or any problem, when it comes to us." (What is the Oxford Group?, p.68, para.1, lines 6-12)

What do we do after we write our thoughts down? We test them, because not all of our thoughts come from God. But, with time and practice, we begin to trust our ability to listen to and follow guidance. Starting with the first sentence at the top of page 87, the "Big Book" authors write:

"What used to be the hunch or the occasional inspiration gradually becomes a working part of the mind. Being still inexperienced and having just made conscious contact with God, it is not probable that we are going to be inspired at all times. We might pay for this presumption in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless, we find that our thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration. We come to rely upon it." (A.A., p.87, lines 1-9)

To protect ourselves from "absurd actions and ideas," the "Big Book" authors tell us to test our thoughts. In December 1934, Bill W., our New York City co-founder, used the Oxford Group Four Standards to test his thinking. In the fourth paragraph on page 13, Bill declares:

"I was to test my thinking by the new God-consciousness within. Common sense would thus become uncommon sense." (A.A., p.13, para. 4, lines 1-3)

For us, it is "common sense" to rely upon alcohol to solve or escape from our problems. The "uncommon sense" is to stay sober and utilize God's guidance to lead us through our difficulties.

Then on page 69, the authors explain that, in addition to our thoughts, we must also test our actions. Starting with the second line in the second paragraph, they write:

"We subjected each relation to this test - was it selfish or not? We asked God to mould our ideals and help us to live up to them." (A.A., p.69, para. 2, lines 2-4)

III

We also test our thoughts during our morning meditation. Here's how it works. When we finish our "quiet time," we check what we have put on paper. Find what we have written is Honest, Pure, Unselfish AND Loving, we can be assured these thoughts have come from God. Conversely, if what we have written is Selfish, Dishonest, Resentful OR Fearful, we can be equally assured these thoughts have come from self.

The "Big Book" authors insist that our Creator will provide us with the answers to all of our questions. They even reveal how the Spirit of the Universe is going to answer our requests for help. In the third paragraph on page 86, they write:

"In thinking about our day we may face indecision. We may not be able to determine which course to take. Here we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or decision. We relax and take it easy. We don't struggle. We are often surprised how the right answers come after we have tried this for a while."(A.A., p.86, para. 3, lines 1-6)

So, God is going to speak to us through inspiration, an intuitive thought, or a decision. If God were going to provide us with "the right answers," wouldn't it be a good idea to write them down so we don't forget them?

We end our morning meditation by asking God to show us, all day long, what to do and how to do it. In the first paragraph on page 87, the "Big Book" authors urge us to pray:

"We usually conclude the period of meditation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever we need to take care of such problems. We ask especially for freedom from self-will, and are careful to make no request for ourselves only."(A.A., p.87, para. 1, lines 1-6)

IV

The "Big Book" authors then describe what to do anytime we get anxious or afraid during the day. We stop what we are doing, get quiet, and listen for God's guidance.

Starting with the third paragraph on page 87, the authors tell us we must get out of self in order to learn God's plan for our lives:

"As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day "Thy will be done." We are then in much less danger of excitement, fear anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire so easily, for we are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves. It works, it really does."(A.A., p.87, para. 3, lines 1-3; p.88, lines 1-7, para. 1, line 1)

This is an ironclad guarantee. It works! From first-hand experience, we can state that guidance has been working in our lives ever since we began a daily "quiet time."

But, what if we don't receive any God given thoughts or guidance? Let us assure you, this can happen at any time. Remember, all "we really have is a daily reprieve contingent upon the maintenance of our spiritual condition." If we don't receive any guidance, it means we have work to do. Maybe we've taken back our will in some area of our lives, or, maybe we haven't made a necessary amends. If this is the case, we take the actions that re-establish our connection with our Creator.

Starting with the second paragraph on page 88, the "Big Book" authors declare, once again, that we need God's help:

"We alcoholics are undisciplined. So we let God discipline us in the simple way we have just outlined. But this is not all. There is action and more action. "Faith without works is dead."" (A.A., p.88, para. 2, lines 1-2; para. 3, lines 1-2)

In order for two-way prayer to be successful, we must constantly practice being in the presence of God. If we do the work, we will receive the rewards - a life filled with peace of mind and well being beyond our wildest dreams.

We will conclude our presentation of the Eleventh Step with a moment of silence so each of us can make contact with the Spirit of the Universe and receive Divine guidance right now.

Step 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.

I

Now that we've made conscious contact with the God of our understanding, we have received the greatest gift of this program - a spiritual awakening. God is now guiding us "in a way which is indeed miraculous."

This life-changing experience comes suddenly to some, gradually to others. In Appendix II on page 569, we learn more about this amazing event.

This appendix was written after the publication of the first printing of the "Big Book" in 1939. In the first printing, the Twelfth Step read:

"Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps..."

During the two years between the first and second printings, the word "experience" was discussed at length. Eventually the word "experience" was replaced with the word "awakening." The "Big Book" authors made this modification in order to include those whose lives had truly changed, but more slowly over a period of time.

Many of you will find this to be the case also. Your life has changed, but gradually rather than suddenly. You may not be able to point to a specific experience that brought about the change, but the spiritual awakening has occurred nonetheless.

Starting with the first paragraph on page 569, the authors start by defining "spiritual experience" and "spiritual awakening."

"The terms 'spiritual experience' and 'spiritual awakening' are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms.

Yet it is true that our printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, must be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous."(A.A., p.569, para. 1, lines 1-5; para. 2, lines 1-5)

A spiritual awakening is nothing more than a psychic change that, among other things, eliminates our obsession to drink. So, Bill W.'s rapid conversion experience at Towns Hospital is the exception rather than the rule.

In the fourth paragraph on page 569, we find the description of a more gradual spiritual experience:

"Among our rapidly growing membership of thousands of alcoholics such transformations, though frequent, are by no means the rule. Most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the 'educational variety' because they develop slowly over a period of time. Quite often friends of the newcomer are aware of the difference long before he is himself. He finally realizes that he has undergone a profound alteration in his reaction to life; that such a change could hardly have been brought about by him alone. What often takes place in a few months could seldom have been accomplished by years of self-discipline. With few exceptions our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource, which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves."(A.A., p.569, para. 4, lines 1-13; p.570, lines 1-2)

Let's look at the fifth sentence again. It reads, "What often takes place in a few months could seldom have been accomplished by years of self-discipline." Here, the "Big Book" authors state that if we remain involved with the Beginners' Meetings for "a few months" we will recover from alcoholism.

Sure, some of us will have a rapid conversion experience during the first month. But, even if we don't "get it" right away, we will still undergo a gradual spiritual awakening if we stay with the Beginners' Meetings long enough>

This is another one of the great messages of hope found in the "Big Book." Just think of it. In the worst case, it will take three months or so for us to overcome our problems.

II

In the first paragraph of page 570, we learn just how easy it is to have a spiritual awakening:

“Most of us think this awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience. Our more religious members call it ‘God-consciousness.’” (A.A., p.570, para. 1, lines 1-3)

That’s all there is to it. If you’ve made contact with the God of your understanding and you have started listening to guidance, you have in fact, already had the spiritual awakening.

Congratulations. You are now living in the “sunlight of the Spirit.”

But, the spiritual awakening is just the first part of the Twelfth Step. Let’s look at what we have to do to maintain this spiritual transformation.

Chapter 7, in its entirety is devoted to carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to others. In the first paragraph of page 89, the “Big Book” authors tell us what we must do to expand our new God-consciousness:

“Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail.” (A.A., p.89, para. 1, lines 1-7)

When we work with others, our lives change. In the second paragraph on page 89, the authors state:

“Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends - this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives.” (A.A., p.89, para. 2, lines 1-7)

On page 89 through 103, the “Big Book” authors provide us with specific instructions on how to carry our lifesaving message of recovery to others. They offer many valuable suggestions on these pages. For now, we are only going to cover a few of them.

In the first paragraph on page 90, they offer this advice:

“When you discover a prospect for Alcoholics Anonymous, find out all you can about him. If he does not want to stop drinking, don’t waste time trying to persuade him. You may spoil a later opportunity.” (A.A., p.90, para. 1, lines 1-4)

In the third paragraph on page 91, the authors even give us specifics on what to say. We begin by telling the prospect our story:

“See your man alone, if possible. At first engage in general conversation. After a while, turn the talk to some phase of drinking. Tell him enough about your drinking habits, symptoms, and experiences to encourage him to speak of himself. If he wishes to talk, let him do so. You will thus get a better idea of how you ought to proceed.” (A.A., p.91, para. 3, lines 1-7)

III

For the next several pages, the “Big Book” authors provide us with additional suggestions on what to say and not to say - what to do and not to do during our Twelfth Step calls.

In the first paragraph on page 96, the authors ask us not to give up if we are successful at getting through to the prospect. They direct us to plant the seed and move on:

“Do not be discouraged if your prospect does not respond at once. Search out another alcoholic and try again. You are sure to find someone desperate enough to accept with eagerness what you offer. We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a man who cannot or will not work with you. If you leave such a person alone, he may soon become convinced that he cannot recover by himself. To spend too much time on any one situation is to deny some other alcoholic an opportunity to live and be happy.” (A.A., p.96, lines 1-10)

Starting with the fifth line in the first paragraph on page 98, they tell us what to do about the person who makes one excuse after another as to why he or she can't stop drinking:

"He clamors for this or that, claiming he cannot master alcohol until his material needs are cared for. Nonsense. Some of us have taken very hard knocks to learn this truth: Job or no job - wife or no wife - we simply do not stop drinking so long as we place dependence upon other people ahead of dependence on God.

Burn the idea into the consciousness of every man that he can get well regardless of anyone. The only condition is that he trust in God and clean house." (A.A., p.98, para. 1, lines 5-12; para. 2, lines 1-3)

How much simpler can it get? Trust God and Clean House!

In the first paragraph on page 100, the "Big Book" authors inform us that we grow spiritually when we "sponsor" someone else into the fellowship:

"Both you and the new man must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things will happen. When we look back, we realize that the things, which came to us when we put ourselves in God's hands, were better than anything we could have planned. Follow the dictates of a Higher Power and you will presently live in a new and wonderful world, no matter what your present circumstances!"(A.A., p. 100, para. 1, lines 1-9)

On page 63, the "Big Book" authors state that God is our "new Employer." In the second paragraph, on page 102, they provide us with a new job description:

"Your new job is to be at the place where you may be of maximum helpfulness to others, so never hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful. You should not hesitate to visit the most sordid spot on earth on such an errand. Keep on the firing line of life with these motives and God will keep you unharmed."(A.A., p. 102, para. 2, lines 1-6)

This concludes our presentation of Step Twelve as found in our "Big Book." Let God guide you when you make your Twelfth Step calls and the Spirit of the Universe will keep you safe and protected. In addition, by relying upon Divine guidance you will "be of maximum service to God and the people about (you)."

IV

Being of service to others is critical to our continued growth and the maintenance of our sobriety. Keep in mind that one of the primary services you can perform is to take prospective members through the Twelve Steps in these Beginners' Meetings. Each time you do this, you will learn more about our life-saving program and gain additional insight into the All Powerful Creator that is at the heart of our new way of life.

Who knows, maybe in a couple of months, some of you will be ready to lead these sessions. As we have discovered, conducting these Beginners' Meetings is a real test of how well we know the "Big Book."

Now, all that's left is to practice these principles in all our affairs. What principles? The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous! They are the principles we practice daily for the rest of our lives.

Starting with the second paragraph on page 164, the "Big Book" authors conclude with yet one more statement concerning the importance of guidance and the necessity of working with others:

"Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the Great Fact for us.

Abandon yourself to God, as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny.

May God bless you and keep you - until then." (A.A., p.164, para. 2, lines 1-10; para. 3, lines 1-6; para. 4, line 1)

We are going to close by reading the first and second paragraphs on page 25 of the "Big Book." We have waited until now to share this passage with you because back when we started this journey, you may not have understood the significance of what is written here. Having completed the Twelve Steps and having had the Spiritual Awakening, you are now in a position to see these words from an entirely new perspective. Your life has changed. You now realize, "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, those in whom the problem had been solved approached us, 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 great fact is just this, and nothing else: That we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences, which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way, which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves." (A.A., p. 25, para. 1, lines 1-12; para. 2, lines 1-9)

We want to welcome each of you who has completed the Twelve Steps to the "fourth dimension of existence." We thank you for providing us the opportunity to by your guides for this miraculous journey.

Summary

I

I am truly blessed to have had a spiritual guide who, not only attended the Beginners' Meetings in the mid-1950's, but also conducted workshops based on this "original" A.A. format for over twenty years. He provided me with a great deal of insight as to how the Beginners' Meetings worked and why they were so successful. In addition he critiqued my early attempts to re-create the four one-hour sessions.

I started leading Beginners' Meetings in 1995 after my guide challenged me to stop talking about the sessions and start doing something about them. "Two years of research is enough," he said. "You need to take some action."

He told me, "You have to get beyond flight school. Take what you've learned and put it to the test. It's time to fly the plane."

This was a terrifying proposition for someone who, prior to A.A., had a deep-seated fear of people and a phobia about speaking in public. But, I walked through the fear and started conducting the Beginners' Meetings. As I saw people recover from alcoholism right before my eyes, I grew more and more confident that God was leading me "in a way which (was) indeed miraculous."

After completing my first "solo flight" of Beginners' Meetings, I realized my guide had been quite astute when he told me, "The only way to understand the "Big Book" is to try to explain it to someone else." In the ensuing years I've discovered there is always more to learn about this miraculous textbook for recovery.

II

In addition to my spiritual guide's "gentle push" to revive the Beginners' Meetings, I was also motivated by an incident that occurred in 1993. At that time, I was just beginning to collect material on the four one-hour sessions.

I was speaking at a Saturday night meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona on the history of Alcoholics Anonymous. During my presentation, I mentioned Earl T., an A.A. pioneer from Chicago, Illinois. His story in the "Big Book" is titled "He Sold Himself Short." In his autobiography, Earl explained how he took the Steps with Dr. Bob in one afternoon.

In February 1938, Earl travelled from Chicago, Illinois, to Akron, Ohio, to get help for his alcoholism. After being "indoctrinated" by eight or nine individuals, Earl was ready to attend his first Oxford Group meeting.

Even though Alcoholics Anonymous had not yet been formed, Bill W. had already taken the Oxford Group "Four Spiritual Activities" and modified them for the Akron "alcoholic squadron" and the New York "nameless bunch of drunks."

This is how Earl T. took his Steps:

"The day before I was to go back to Chicago, a Wednesday and Dr. Bob's afternoon off, he had me down to the office and we spent three or four hours formally going through the Six-step program as it was at that time. The six steps were:

1. Complete deflation. [A.A.'s Steps 1, 2 and 3]
2. Dependence and guidance from a Higher Power. [A.A.'s Step 11]
3. Moral inventory. [A.A.'s Step 4 and 10]
4. Confession. [A.A.'s Steps 5, 6 and 7]
5. Restitution. [A.A.'s Steps 8 and 9]
6. Continues work with other alcoholics. [A.A.'s Step 12]

"Dr. Bob led me through all of these steps. At the moral inventory, he brought up some of my bad personality traits or character defects, such as selfishness, conceit, jealousy, carelessness, intolerance, ill-temper, sarcasm and resentments. We went over these at great length and then he finally asked me if I wanted these defects of character removed. When I said yes, we both knelt at his desk and prayed,

each of us asking to have these defects taken away." (A.A. "Big Book" Page 291, or in the 4th edition, page 263, para. 6, line 1; page 292, lines 1-10; para. 1, lines 1-9)

In a couple of hours, Dr. Bob and Earl compiled and discussed Earl's list of character liabilities. This is the second reference in the "Big Book" to a "sponsor" leading a newcomer through the equivalent of the Fourth and Fifth Steps. The first reference is Ebby T. who took Bill W. through the Steps of Surrender (A.A.'s Steps 1, 2 and 3), Sharing (A.A.'s Steps 4, 5, 6 and 7), in the "Big Book"

Dr. Bob used an Assets and Liabilities Checklist to take Earl through the Moral Inventory. This format came directly from the Oxford Group and was used throughout the A.A. fellowship during the 1940's and 1950's. In 1938, Dr. Bob's checklist consisted of eight liabilities and five of the eight were almost identical to those used in the Back to Basics Beginners' meetings today:

Dr. Bob's List of Liabilities

1. Selfishness
2. Conceit
3. Jealousy
4. Carelessness
5. Intolerance
6. Ill-temper
7. Sarcasm
8. Resentment

'Back To Basics' List of Liabilities

1. Selfishness
2. False Pride
3. Jealousy
4. Laziness
5. (False Pride)
6. (Resentment)
7. (False Pride)
8. Resentment

During the Saturday night speaker meeting in Scottsdale, AZ. I also brought up Clarence S., another A.A. pioneer. His story in the "Big Book" is titled, "Home Brewmeister."

Clarence found sobriety and a new way of living without alcohol in February 1938. He played an instrumental role in the early, explosive growth of A.A. in Cleveland, Ohio.

Clarence used to take newcomers through the Steps in a weekend. He'd say, "Come to me on Friday evening on Step One and by the time you leave on Sunday morning you'll be on Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve. These are the Steps you will practice for the rest of your life."

Clarence also utilized the Assets and Liabilities Checklist to take newcomers through the Steps. He used the seventeen-item Moral Inventory that was published in the June 1946 issue of The A.A. Grapevine.

III

At the conclusion of this Saturday evening speaker meeting, a man came up to me and said, "I am confused. I just paid \$18,000 for 21 days of treatment and I am now in aftercare. I go to individual therapy, group therapy and A.A. meetings. Both my therapist and my A.A. sponsor told me to take one Step a year."

"I thought it a bit far-fetched that it would take me 12 years to complete the A.A. program, but I didn't question what those people told me. Then, tonight I heard you talk about taking the Steps in a couple of hours. Now, I don't know what to think."

I was shocked to learn that some people within the recovery community had placed such a formidable barrier between the newcomer and the solution to his or her problem. Before this conversation, I had never heard anyone say, "Take one Step a year."

I immediately replied, "I can't speak for you, but I do know that if anyone had told me to work one Step a year, I'd have been drunk before I ever got to the Second Step. The question you need to ask is, 'Where in the text of the 'Big Book' does it say to take one Step a year?' It's not in there. As far as I am concerned, if what you hear isn't in the 'Big Book', it's not a part of the A.A. program."

I wish this conversation had turned out to be an isolated incident, but I'm sorry to say this has not been the case. I've heard this "one Step a year" philosophy along with "no Steps for the first eighteen months" espoused many times since 1993.

I am so fortunate to have been told right from the beginning of my spiritual journey that, "The program is contained in one book and one book only – the 'Big Book' of Alcoholics Anonymous. The 'Twelve and Twelve and other books may provide additional information, but they don't contain the instructions on how to take the steps. Stick with the 'Big Book' – read it every day."

Over the years, I've seen many well-intentioned people add layer upon layer of complexity to the "Big Book" directions. I've talked to people who have left treatment centres with "all the answers." They "graduate" with notebooks containing several hundred pages of material on alcoholism and mini-novels on their First and Fourth Steps.

IV

In order to get back to the basics, we must first appreciate where we came from. "Keep it simple" was more than a slogan, it was a way of life. How the old-timers actually practiced the A.A. program during the highly successful early days of the fellowship was quite different than how most A.A.'s today think they practiced it.

In the course of conducting research for this book, I talked with many A.A. old-timers who provided me with the information that was quite surprising and, in some cases, almost unbelievable when compared to the current A.A. program. I tried to keep an open mind about what they told me because I found it difficult to argue with success. A few of their more startling revelations follow:

1. Most early A.A.'s never did a written Fourth Step. I interviewed more than one hundred A.A. pioneers who sobered up in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Only a few of them put anything on paper in terms of an inventory. Those that wrote at all, made a list of assets and liabilities. So, what about the three-column inventory described on page 65 of the "Big Book?" Isn't that the inventory we're supposed to use as our guide because "its in the book?" All I can say is that even though Bill W. took it upon himself to add it to the "Big Book," neither he nor any other A.A. pioneer from the 1940's ever used this inventory to take the Steps or to take anyone else through them. Of the old-timers who did a written inventory, all of the ones I interviewed, used the "commercial inventory" described on page 64.
2. The role of the "sponsor" in early A.A. was limited. Many old-timers reported that the Group as a whole sponsored them rather than any particular individual. In the areas of North America where the Beginners' Meetings were held, the "sponsor's" commitment to the newcomer was usually for four to five weeks. After the newcomer completed the four one-hour sessions, both the "sponsor" and the newcomer moved on to help others through the Steps.
3. The "sponsor's" responsibilities were clearly defined. Two pamphlets on sponsorship were distributed during the mid-1940's. The first one, A*A Sponsorship – Its opportunities and Responsibilities, was published by the Cleveland Central Committee in 1944. In that pamphlet the authors make the following statements: "No one reaps full benefit from any fellowship he is connected with unless he whole-heartedly engages in its important activities. The expansion of Alcoholics Anonymous to wider fields of greater benefit to more people, results directly from the addition of new, worthwhile members or associates.

"Any A.A. who has not experienced the joys and satisfaction of helping another alcoholic regain his place in life has not yet fully realized the complete benefits of this fellowship.

A.A. is a fellowship of men and women banded together by their inability to use alcohol in any form sensibly, or with profit or pleasure. Obviously, any new members introduced should be the same kind of people, suffering from the same disease.

V

To give the new member a broad and complete picture of A.A., the sponsor should take him to various meetings within convenient distance of his home. Attending several meetings gives the new man a chance to select a group in which he will be most happy and comfortable, and it is extremely important to let the prospect

make his own decision as to which group he will join. Impress upon him that he is always welcome at any meeting and can change his home group if he so wishes.

These suggestions for sponsoring a new man in A.A. teachings are by no means complete. They are intended only for a framework and general guide. Each individual case is different and should be treated as such. Additional information for sponsoring a new man can be obtained from the experience of older men in the work. A co-sponsor, with an experienced and a newer member working on a prospect, has proven very successful."

The Cleveland pamphlet described the rewards of sponsorship and our singleness of purpose. In addition, it provided instructions on how to make the Twelfth Step calls.

The second pamphlet on sponsorship, A Manual for Alcoholics Anonymous, was authorized by A.A.'s co-founder, Dr. Bob S. and published by the Akron, Ohio Group sometime prior to 1946. It contained sections titled, "To the Newcomer" and "To the Sponsor."

In the section "To the Sponsor," the authors wrote:

"You must assume full responsibility for this man. You must fulfil all pledges you make to him, either tangible or intangible. If you cannot fulfil a promise, do not make it.

This is a very critical time in his life. He looks to you for courage, hope, comfort and guidance. He fears the past. He is uncertain of the future. And he is in a frame of mind that the least neglect on your part will fill him with resentment and self-pity. You have in your hands the most valuable property in the world – the future of a fellow man. Treat his life as carefully as you would your own. You are literally responsible for his life.

"Accompany him to his first meeting. Take him along with you when you call on the next patient. Telephone him when there are other patients. Drop in at his home occasionally. Telephone him as often as possible. Urge him to look up the new friends he has made."

The authors of the Akron pamphlet state that it is the responsibility of the "sponsor" to call the newcomer. This seems rather obvious, considering it is the newcomer who is sick and is in need of help. Somehow, this philosophy has been lost to many A.A.'s today.

4. In most areas, the Beginners' Meetings were sponsored and funded by an A.A. Home Group. Consequently, the basket was not passed during the four one-our sessions.

In Miami, Florida and Boston, Massachusetts, the local Intergroup Office funded the Beginners' Meetings because they were considered to be Twelfth Step service work. When an A.A. answered a call for help, he or she would talk to the prospect; if necessary, get the prospect into a hospital; and then accompany the prospect to the Beginners' Meetings. The Twelfth Step call was not considered to be complete until the A.A. took the newcomer through the Steps.

5. Although the Beginners' Meetings were a significant part of the recovery process throughout the United States and Canada, they were only designed to give the newcomer a rough overview of the A.A. program. The Beginners' Meetings were not a substitute for, but rather a supplement to the Open Speaker and Closed Discussion meetings that were the heart of the "original" A.A. program.

The authors of the Washington, D.C. pamphlet made this clear when they wrote the following:

"The material contained herein is merely an outline of the... program and is not intended to replace or supplant-

- a) The careful reading and re-reading of the "Big Book"
- b) Regular attendance at weekly group meetings.
- c) Study of the program.
- d) Daily practice of the Program.
- e) Reading of approved printed matter on Alcoholism [approved by the Group not the New York headquarters].
- f) Informal discussions with other members.

This instruction is not a short cut to A.A. It is an introduction – a help – a brief course in the fundamentals.”

VI

A.A.'s co-founder, Dr. Bob S., is well known for his commitment to working with others. From 1939 until his death in 1950, Dr. Bob treated alcoholics at St. Thomas hospital in Akron, Ohio. During these eleven years, he helped 4,800 alcoholics recover, which was the equivalent of one person per day. He was so successful; Bill W. called him the “Prince of the Twelve Steppers.”

Just as he had done with Earl T., Dr. Bob took each newcomer through the Steps quickly. Duke P., who sobered up in August 1940, tells how Dr. Bob led him through the Fourth and Fifth Steps in about an hour. During that time, Dr. Bob had Duke look at his assets and liabilities. Dr. Bob told Duke to “Keep it simple, and lubricate it with love.”

The Assets and Liabilities Checklist that Dr. Bob and many of the A.A. pioneers used for the Moral Inventory came directly from the Oxford Group program. In “What is the Oxford Group?” which was written anonymously in 1933, the author described the process that later became the A.A.'s Fourth and Fifth Steps.

“Sharing of faults as practiced by the Group is sharing in the ordinary sense of the word. In plain language it is telling, or talking over, our shortcomings with another who has already surrendered him or her life to God.”

In 1934, Victor Kitchen, one of the many recovered alcoholics in the Oxford Group, wrote ‘I was a Pagan.’ Victor attended meetings at the Calvary Church in New York City with Bill W. for several years. In his book, Victor described his Assets and Liabilities checklist:

“I felt that my character possessed many negative attributes such as fear, anger, revenge and false pride; and that it also held many positive potentialities such as poise, good nature, sympathy and understanding. I tried to make a chart of these things, showing which qualities fell on the positive side and which on the negative.”

In ‘When Man Listens’, Cecil Rose described the “commercial inventory” which the “Big Book” authors referred to on page 64 of the book Alcoholics Anonymous:

“If a man is bankrupt and consents to a reorganization of the business, the first thing he must do is produce the books – all of them. The difficulty with so many debtors is that they conceal some of the debts, or fail to mention some particularly foolish blunder or some doubtful transaction. A satisfactory reorganization is impossible if there is only a partial disclosure. If we want God to take control of our lives, the first thing we must do is to produce the books. We must be willing to look, with God, at everything.”

The assets side of the ledger consisted of the Four Standards.

“A good way to begin the examination of the books is to test our lives beside the Sermon on the Mount. A convenient and pointed summary of its teaching has been made under the four headings of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love.”

Several Oxford Group authors described the liabilities side of the ledger in great detail. A.J. Russell, the author of ‘For Sinners Only’, listed a series of liabilities under four general headings. These were Dishonesty, Impurity, Selfishness and Fear. These were essentially the same attributes the “Big Book” authors used as a test for self-will in A.A.'s Fourth, Tenth and Eleventh Steps.

VII

In the early days of A.A., various checklists were used to take the newcomer through the Inventory and Restitution process. Dr. Bob's list contained eight assets and liabilities, the Washington; D.C. pamphlet had six, and the June 1946 issue of ‘The A.A. Grapevine’ seventeen.

Whether we use four, six, eight, or seventeen assets and liabilities, the process is the same. We use the checklist to identify and remove those characteristics of self that have kept us blocked off from God.

The Assets and Liabilities Checklist was still being used in the 1950's. In the January 1952 issue of ‘The A.A. Grapevine,’ the editorial board published an article on the Fourth Step Moral Inventory:

"One practical way of starting this very practical step is to prepare a record sheet with two columns, one headed, 'Liabilities' and the other, 'Assets.'

Under 'Liabilities' can be listed personality deficiencies and faults, such as intolerance, selfishness, indecisiveness, fear, indolence, a bad temper, impatience and a whole host of other qualities which most everyone at this early stage discovers he (or she) has in abundance.

Under 'Assets,' if any, can be listed the opposite positives – tolerance, generosity, thoughtfulness of other people, humility, patience and a few other attributes. Few persons, if honest, ever work up much of a list on this side of the ledger for their first moral inventory."

When Dr. Bob died on November 16th 1950, Alcoholics Anonymous was still in its infancy. Because of this, very little of what Dr. Bob had to say about our miraculous program was ever recorded.

He may have been a man of few words, but what Dr. Bob did say demonstrated his devotion and commitment to A.A.'s "original, God based program of recovery. In 1948, he described the sheer simplicity of the Twelve Steps and stated that when we take them "under divine guidance" they are a practical solution to all of our problems:

"As finally expressed and offered, they [the Twelve Steps] are simple in language and meaning. They are workable by any person having a sincere desire to obtain and keep sobriety. The results are the proof. Their simplicity and workability are such that no special interpretations, and certainly no reservations, have ever been necessary. And it has become increasingly clear that the degree of harmonious living which we achieve is in direct ratio to our earnest attempt to follow them under divine guidance to the best of our ability."

The Beginners' Meetings are a very effective and highly successful way to take the Twelve Steps and learn how to carry A.A.'s life saving message of recovery to others. As Dr. Bob so clearly stated, "The results ARE the proof."

"It works – it really does."