

WEEK #1 – “THE DOCTOR’S OPINION”

[READ AFTER: Page XXVI, Paragraph 3]

ALLERGY: We as laymen have a basic understanding and definition for the word “**allergy**”. If you have an allergy to something, it would always be indicated or manifested by some physical reaction.

For instance, say you are allergic to strawberries and you eat them. You break out in a rash. If you are allergic to penicillin and you take a shot, you will break out in welts all over your body. If you are allergic to milk or dairy products and you drink or eat them, then you get a form of dysentery. These are physical manifestations of an allergy.

When I came to AA they told me I had an allergy to alcohol and I could never drink it safely again. How can I have an allergy to alcohol? I drank a quart of it a day! How can you drink that much of something if you are allergic to it? Besides that, it never made me break out in a rash. It doesn't put welts on my body. I didn't understand and ask them to explain it to me. They said “You don't need to understand. All you need to know is that you are allergic and you can't drink.” Today I know why they told me that: because they didn't understand it either.

Being an inquisitive alcoholic, I needed to know. So, I went to a source which never fails me: Webster's dictionary. I looked it up and it states: “**An allergy is an abnormal reaction to any food, beverage or substance of any kind.**” An **ABNORMAL REACTION!**

I tried to see where I was abnormal when it came to alcohol. To my amazement, I didn't know what was **normal or abnormal**. For me to find out, I had to go to those ‘normal people’: the nine out of ten people considered to be “normal, socially moderate, temperate drinkers”... Those who drink alcohol and do not get in trouble with it.

I asked if they would describe to me what happens when they take a drink. They said they get a warm comfortable relaxing feeling after one or two drinks... and they don't want any more for the rest of the night. I don't feel that way when I drink. I don't understand a warm, comfortable, relaxing feeling. I get a “get up and go somewhere and do something” feeling. I think it is one of the reasons I love to drink. It makes me feel different than it does for a normal social drinker. They said something else that absolutely amazed me. When they have two or three drinks, they get a slightly tipsy, out of control and the beginnings of a nauseous feeling. They don't like that tipsy, nauseous feeling, so they only want one or two drinks. Today I realize that is a normal reaction to alcohol.

ALCOHOL IS A TOXIC DRUG. It is a destroyer of human tissue. Normally the **mind** and the **body**, when you put something in it that is going to destroy it, will sense what's there and react by wanting to “throw it up” and “get it out”. The normal reaction to alcohol is a nauseous feeling in the body. My physical reaction, instead of nausea, is **a craving for more of the same**. That is a **physical craving** and it is so strong that it overcomes the ability of my mind to stop me after I start. I react abnormally. The difference between normal and abnormal is: the majority of people, (nine out of ten), don't get the **physical craving**.

We **react abnormally** in two ways: 1) **It makes us feel different** than normal people; and 2) It produces the **phenomenon of craving**. That **physical craving** ensures we will continue until **we get drunk every time we take a drink**.

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[CONTINUE READING: Page XXVIII, Paragraph 1]

Chronic: “Reacting over and over again”

Phenomenon: “Something we do not understand”.

Craving: Usually you are dealing with the mind, **but in the context of the Big Book, you are dealing with the body.** Craving is what happens after we put one or two drinks in our body. It produces a **physical craving** for more of the same.

[CONTINUE READING: Page XXX, Paragraphs 1 – 5]

In the era this book was written medical science had not yet uncovered the chemical breakdown that occurs in the body. That is why Dr. Silkworth called it a **phenomenon of craving**. Today, science has discovered the exact reaction that takes place when we ingest alcohol.

{**LEADER EXPLAINS DISEASE CONCEPT OF ALCOHOLISM:** By reading pages 12–13 while the group looks at diagram on page 15}

NORMAL PERSON: For the normal social drinker, (this is approximately 8 people out of 10, today) you have a line on the drawing that represents these people who can drink safely and are at ease with alcohol. Alcohol is no problem for them. They take a drink and put it in their system and the mind and the body recognizes what it is. The enzyme production begins and the enzymes start to attack the alcohol and begin to metabolize or break it down. The enzymes break it down to the first state, a chemical called **acetaldehyde**. Later, after a time, it is broken down to a chemical called **diacidic acid** and finally over more time to **acetone**. **Acetone** is rapidly broken down to a **simple carbohydrate** which is made up of **water, sugar** and **carbon dioxide**. In normal people, the break down of acetone to simple carbohydrates occurs quickly. The body can use the sugar. Sugar has calories and it has energy. Interestingly enough they are empty calories. They are not any of the things necessary for life, such as, amino acids, vitamins, etc., but it is a form of energy the body can use. The body burns up the sugar and stores the excess as fat, the water is dissipated through the urinary and intestinal tracks and the carbon dioxide is expelled through the lungs. For the normal person, alcohol is broken down (metabolized) at a rate of about 1oz per hour.

ABNORMAL PERSON: These are the 1-2 out of 10 who can not drink safely or who has a “**DIS**”-“**EASE**” with alcohol. By the way, that's all the word **disease** means... something that separates you from a sense of ease, something that separates you from the normal thing that happens to most people. When we alcoholics put a drink in our bodies, the same thing starts to take place for all of us. The mind and body recognize what it is. The enzyme production starts and attacks the alcohol and breaks it down first to **acetaldehyde**... then to **diacidic acid**, and finally over more time to **acetone**. It seems that in the body of the alcoholic the enzymes, necessary to break it down from **acetone** to the **simple carbohydrates**, are not there in the same qualities and quantities as in the body of the non-alcoholic. Therefore, the rate acetone is broken down to simple carbohydrates is a much slower operation which keeps the level of acetone up in our bodies for a longer period of time. **It is the acetone in our bodies that creates the physical craving.** For the alcoholic, alcohol is broken down (metabolized) at a significantly slower rate of 3/4oz per hour, or 1/2oz per hour or even 1/5oz per hour depending on the enzyme production which is directly related to the stage of alcoholism we are in.

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The medical profession today has proven beyond any shadow of a doubt that **acetone ingested into the human system**, that remains there for any appreciable period of time, **will produce an actual physical craving** for more of the same. As the **craving** is produced, the body then begins to say to the mind, "Let me have more of that stuff you just put in there." So, instead of having the one drink we intended to have, the body says, "Give me the second drink... the third drink... the fourth drink... the sixth drink." Now, **the first drink was caused by the mind... but those after, were caused by the body.**

We think that one of the most interesting things recently discovered is this: the medical profession has proven that **alcohol ingested into the human system** over a period of time **is an actual destroyer of human tissue**. As we drink more and more, we destroy more and more human tissue in all parts of the body. But it seems as though the first two organs of the body that are attacked, in most cases, happens to be the liver and pancreas. They have also proven today, that **the enzymes necessary to metabolize alcohol come from the liver and the pancreas**. As we drink we begin to damage the organs of the body, the enzyme production becomes less and less and less and the **phenomenon of craving becomes harder and harder and harder.**

So you see we not only have a **disease**, we have a **progressive disease**, guaranteed to get worse as time goes by because we are destroying the organs of the body that are necessary to metabolize alcohol. We also know that as we grow older, everything that the body produces begins to shut down. So, as we get older, **the enzyme production becomes less due to the age factor**. Therefore our **disease is a progressive disease whether we drink or not**. The fact that we are allergic to alcohol is academic, if we don't take the first drink. We need to understand that **the main problem and the solution are going to be within the mind**, even though the body is going to get worse with age. I think, sometimes in A.A., we don't explain this to the new people about the physical factor of their disease.

{Leader reviews and describes “Alcohol’s Effects on the Brain and Behavior” page 16}

[READ: Page XXVIII Paragraph 4 to “Differentiate the true from the false.”]

We must understand, if we are going to deal with alcoholics, that **practicing alcoholics can not differentiate the true from the false**. To most of them, what they are doing is aaaaaaabsolutely normal. To the alcoholic mind, it is all the normal people who are abnormal. We surround ourselves with people of our own kind, diluting our minds into thinking that we are different. As far as the practicing alcoholic is concerned, it is the normal drinkers who are abnormal. **We can see that drinking is injurious and gets us into trouble, but we really cannot differentiate the true from the false, because to us, we are doing what we consider normal.**

An **obsession of the mind** is an idea so powerful that it overcomes all other ideas to the contrary. It's so strong that it **will make you believe something that isn't true**. When we drank we had a couple of drinks and it made us feel better. So our minds put those two thoughts together. Feel bad... take a drink and feel better. That is a **mental** addiction not a **physical** one. The mind says it's OK to take a drink and the mind really believes it is OK. The mind says it will be different this time... the mind believes it. That is “**BELIEVING A LIE**”.

Any alcoholic who believes he can drink successfully believes a lie.

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The **obsession of the mind** causes us to believe a lie and take the first couple of drinks. As soon as we put the first drink in our bodies, the **allergy of the body** takes over triggering the **phenomenon of craving** and we cannot stop. The one thing that you and I can do for the practicing alcoholic is to help them see the **allergy of the body** and the **obsession of the mind** that they are experiencing. I didn't know about these two problems when I was drinking.

[READ: Page XXVIII Paragraph 4 at “To Them” to end of 1st Paragraph Page XXIX]

SUMMARY

IF YOU:

**CAN'T DRINK BECAUSE OF THE ALLERGY OF THE BODY
AND
CAN'T QUIT BECAUSE OF THE OBSESSION OF THE MIND**

THEN:

YOU ARE POWERLESS OVER ALCOHOL

READ:

PAGE 355, Paragraph 2

“Study the AA Book, Don't just read it.”

READ QUESTIONS: Answer questions as a group, stopping for questions and answers. Discuss any reservations people are having that they are alcoholic.

DISEASE CONCEPT OF ALCOHOLISM

MENTAL

PHYSICAL

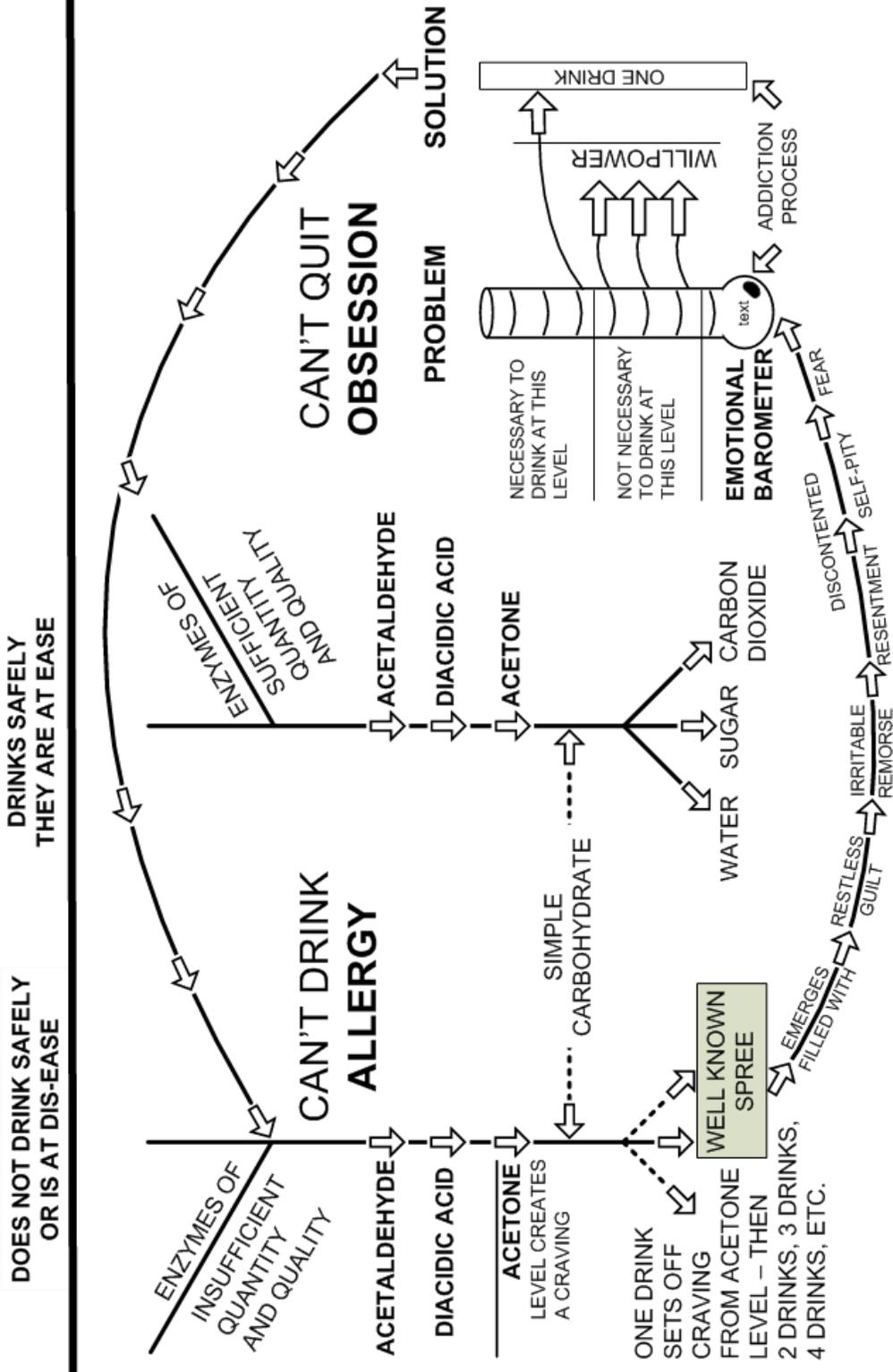


Figure 1 – Disease Concept of Alcoholism

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Alcohol’s Effects on Brain and Behavior

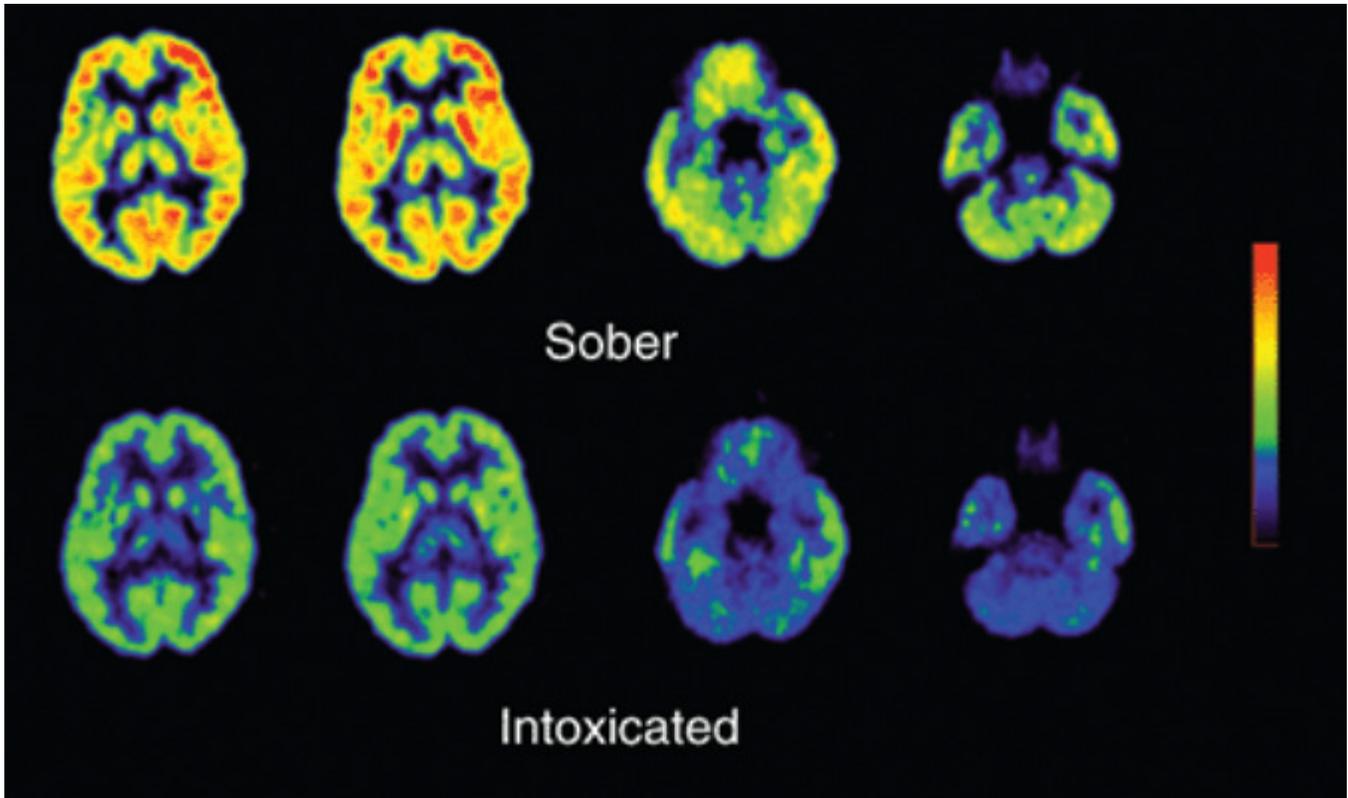


Figure 2 – Alcohol’s effect on the brain

BRAIN AREA	EFFECTED FUNCTIONS	NORMAL: NON-ALCOHOLIC	ABNORMAL: ALCOHOLIC
As alcohol takes effect, it stimulates and suppresses different areas of the brain			
This leads to: reduction in anxiety; euphoria; aggression and memory loss.			
No Obsession			
Obsessive			
FIRST STAGE: DECREASED ACTIVITY			
Cerebellum	Controls basic motor function Controls balance Controls visual cortex (rear-brain)	OK, as long as rate of consumption is 1 drink/hr.	Once started, little or no control over the amount or rate of consumption. Obsession turns to craving.
SECOND STAGE: DECREASED ACTIVITY			
Midbrain (limbic)	Generates feelings of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Stimulation ❖ Pleasure ❖ Euphoria 	Had enough	I like this feeling! (Craving takes over and is in control)
THIRD STAGE: DECREASED ACTIVITY			
Basal Ganglia	Disrupts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Normal Motor Skills ❖ Coordination ❖ Thinking 	No Thanks... I'm feeling it.	I want MORE!
FORTH STAGE: DECREASED ACTIVITY			
Left Brain (Controls Language Processing) Frontal Cortex (Controls motor skills, and reasoning.)	Words become slurred. Vision is distorted.	Rarely reaches this stage. Remembers vomiting and hangovers.	Cannot stop drinking.

Table 1 : Effects on Areas of the Brain – Non-Alcoholic vs. Alcoholic

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BIG BOOK WORKSHOP HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Read “**STEP ONE**” in the “Twelve and Twelve” book – USE HIGHLIGHTER!!!
- 2) Read Chapter 1 “**BILL’S STORY**” in the “Big Book” (1st Time) -- USE HIGHLIGHTER!!!
(Just read and highlight the 1st time through the Bill’s Story.)
- 3) Read Chapter 1 “**BILL’S STORY**” in the “Big Book” (2nd Time). Be prepared to discuss this matter as it applies to your life in the second week. Continue to write how you are powerless over alcohol and how your ideas have changed as a result of reading the “DR’s OPINION”. Answer the work assignment questions below as outlined for “Bill’s Story” and be prepared to discuss them.

WORK ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS "BILL’S STORY"

*Always Write
an Example!!*

[Page 1]

1. Did alcohol work for you?
2. Did alcohol affect the way you thought and felt?

[Page 3]

1. Did alcohol take an important and exhilarating part of your life?
2. Did your drinking later assume more serious proportions?

[Page 5]

1. Did you ever ask: “Was I crazy?”
2. Did alcohol cease to be a luxury and become a necessity?
3. Did things gradually get worse?
4. Do you still think you control it? (Alcohol or the situation – your life?)

[Page 6]

1. Did you ever feel remorse, horror and/or hopelessness the next morning after drinking?
2. Did your mind ever race uncontrollably?
3. Did you ever seek oblivion?

[Page 7]

1. Can self-knowledge fix you?

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WORK ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS (Continued) "BILL'S STORY"

*Always Write
an Example!!*

[Page 8]

1. Did you ever feel lonely?
2. Did you ever feel fear?
3. Can fear keep you sober?
4. Did alcohol overwhelm you?
5. Was alcohol your master?

[Page 10]

1. What was your reaction to religion, the church and God?

[Page 12]

NOTE: Note what happened to Bill's prejudice against "their God" when he began to apply his own conception of God.

1. Did you know that "**nothing more was required of me to make my beginning...**" than willingness or a willingness to believe?

[Page 13]

1. Can you admit for the first time, that of yourself, you are nothing and without God you are lost?
2. Does Bill, essentially, take the First through the Eleventh Step at this time?

EXERCISE: Have you done the exercise with the first eight pages?

In so doing, in these areas as you relate to them, are you as hopeless as Bill?

If so, is there hope for you on Page 17, Paragraph 1?