

WEEK SIX: Chapter 4 – WE AGNOSTICS

READ: Page 44, paragraph 1 → page 44, paragraph 3

In the first paragraph, Bill asks us two questions:

1. **When you honestly want to, is it true you cannot quit entirely?** (That is the **obsession**.)
2. **When drinking, do you have little control over the amount you take?** (That is the **allergy**.)

If your honest answer to either or both of these questions is “yes” then you are probably alcoholic. We need not ask ourselves anything more than those two questions to determine whether or not we are alcoholic.

Some people tend to over complicate things. Our fellowship today has taken **two simple questions** and first expanded them to **ten questions**, then **twenty questions** and finally turned it into a **pamphlet**, which has **forty-four questions**! Thank God, Ebby didn't have the forty-four questions when he went into Bill's kitchen. Imagine Bill sitting there drunk...he has been drinking for three weeks straight. Now imagine if Ebby had asked, "Bill, has alcohol been bothering your reputation?" Hell, he hadn't had a reputation in years! Or if Ebby had asked, "Has alcohol been interfering with your sex life?" He hadn't had any of that in years either. One of the forty-four questions asks, "Do you drink alone?" Well think about it...If I'm buying, the answer is "yes"... and if you're buying, then "no".

We had an old friend that used to live in Tyler, Texas. His name was Wino Joe. I've always felt sorry for everybody in AA that didn't get to meet Wino Joe. He was a real character. He's dead now, but Wino Joe had made up his own list to ask yourself to see if you're alcoholic. The first question on his list was "Has the roof of your mouth ever been sunburned while drinking?" He said, "If it has, you're probably alcoholic." I think the second question was, "Have you ever been arrested for drunk driving from the back seat of somebody else's car?" The third one I loved was, "Have you ever been arrested for public drunkenness while in jail?" He had a big list of them.

We only need the two questions Bill gave us. I use them all the time. People come to me and ask, "Do you think I might be alcoholic?" I say, "I have no idea. Let me ask you a couple of questions. Have you been able to quit drinking entirely left on your own resources?" If they are a real alcoholic, they have to say "no". Then I ask, "Do you have any control over the amount you take after you've started drinking?" If they are a real alcoholic, they've got to say "no", and then I say, "Well you're probably an alcoholic". That's about as simple as you can make it. Now, if that is your case too, you may be suffering from an illness which only a **spiritual experience** can conquer.

We are a very unique people. We are the few people in the world that have an illness of the mind and the body that can only be overcome by a spiritual experience. We realize that we are the only people in the world that have an illness that is a terminal illness and we can come out of it in better shape than when we went into it.

The third paragraph has two words that need to be defined: "**Atheist**" and "**Agnostic**"

- **ATHEIST** - **One who says God does not exist.** If a person really believes that, there is no power on earth for him greater than human power. The only power that he can depend upon is his own mind. He can't really trust other people. Since there is no God, he must run his own show, effect his own destiny, and make his own decisions. **Are you an atheist?**

- **AGNOSTIC** - One who believes God exists, but because you cannot prove it, he acts as though God does not exist. He runs his own show, effects his own decisions, stands on his own two feet, and rules his destiny. In other words, he acts exactly like the atheist does, yet he believes that God exists. **Are you an agnostic?**

For either case, **atheist** or **agnostic**, we are going to have to find some way to have this **spiritual experience**, and to use this Power greater than human power. For many of us that seems to be an impossible task. Let's see how we make that transition: "How do I get from that state to the state of being a true Believer?" A true believer is one who believes in God and acts as if he does: He doesn't stand on his own two feet, doesn't run his own show, and doesn't rule his own destiny. He turns to God for help and gets the guidance and the strength and the Power he needs. He believes that God does exist. Even the atheist will admit that there is such a thing as evolution and if evolution isn't evidence of some Power greater than human power, I don't know what is. I think most of us are agnostics when we get to A.A. We believe in God, but we don't turn to God for help and direction. We run our own show. And we get the same results as the atheist.

READ: Page 44, paragraph 4 → page 45, paragraph 2

I've never met an alcoholic yet who didn't have a **code of morals** or a **philosophy for life**. We know what we should do and we know what we shouldn't do. We know how we should live and we know how we shouldn't live. But our problem is **because of our alcoholism, we are unable to live up to those codes, those philosophies and those morals**.

"Lack of power that was our dilemma." You know if we weren't powerless we wouldn't be here would we? It goes on to say **"Its main objective is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem."** It doesn't say which will help you solve it. It says the main objective is to enable you to find the Power greater than yourself and then **that Power will solve the problem**. Interestingly enough, from this point on we are through talking about alcohol. From page 45 on, we will talk about one thing and one thing only. **How we can find this Power?** And if we can find the **Power**, then **the Power will solve the problem**. We know that for every one of us the main problem is a lack of Power. We were driven here under the lash of alcoholism. We came here because **we are powerless over alcohol**. If we're powerless, **we lack the power**, and **then the obvious answer is Power**, and **the question is, whether you're atheist or agnostic or not, how do you find the Power?** Surely we're not true believers because if we were, we would have had the Power before we came to A.A. However, we can get this Power and apply it in our lives in order to overcome our disease. Now, **if we're atheist or agnostic, maybe we can change to a true believer and find that Power and then that Power will solve our problem**. The rest of the chapter is devoted to how do you find that Power. The whole rest of the book is devoted to that one subject. It is a very simple procedure and it starts over on page 47.

READ: Page 45, paragraph 3 → page 47, paragraph 2

So the wonderfully effective spiritual structure we're building is the spiritual experience or the spiritual awakening. The **foundation** of that structure was **Step One**, which is **willingness**. Bill also tells us the **cornerstone** of that structure is **Step Two; believing**. Bill tells us that the cornerstone is to believe or to be willing to believe that there is Power greater than human power. This is the beginning. Bill calls this the "cornerstone". Remember, when we took Step One that was **willingness** to change. Once you see that you're powerless over alcohol and your life has become unmanageable and that this isn't going to work, then you become willing to change.

That's the "foundation". Once the foundation is laid, on that foundation we lay a cornerstone. After you become willing to change, then you have to believe you can change. Step Two is the "cornerstone". All we have to do to start off in this program is to **believe** or **become willing to believe**. So we have two parts of the wonderfully effective spiritual structure in place if we can say "yes, we believe" or "yes, we are willing to believe". Notice the asterisk at the bottom of the page. Please be sure to read Appendix II about the "Spiritual Experience". This is the third time we have been referred to Appendix II Spiritual Experience; the wonderfully effective **spiritual structure** is this vital **spiritual experience**. We are going to see as we progress through the steps that we are building that spiritual experience, or that spiritual structure. We have already put two of the stones in place, so we are already building the structure as we are going through the book, chapter by chapter.

READ: Page 47, paragraph 3 → page 48, top paragraph

All you have to do to start out is to believe. **Believing** comes before you do something and **Faith** comes after you believe and then take action. Today, how can you not believe that there must be some Power working within this fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous? When you first come in here, you don't know that to be true, but you can believe it. And if you **stay** with us long enough and **work the program** and **have a spiritual experience**, then you'll know it; and that is **Faith**. But, *faith without works is dead*.

READ: Page 48, paragraph 1 → page 51, paragraph 1

The reason we have everything we've got today is because it's been developed within the last century. Students of Ancient History tell us that the intellect of men in those days was equal to the best of today. I used to think we invented this stuff because we were smarter. But we really aren't. People who lived thousands of years ago were just as smart as we are today. Yet in ancient times, material progress was painfully slow. Very little of this stuff was developed years ago. Thousands of years ago, even 500 years ago, you were not allowed to believe differently. You couldn't believe anything different because of superstition, tradition, and fixed ideas. These kept you from believing differently and you couldn't change anything. It's only in the last 100 years that our minds have been freed in the realm of the material to believe differently. The reason we went to the moon is because somebody believed we could do that. This is the same reason why we have microwaves, cars, and television.

I think the story of Columbus is one of the greatest examples of what you can do when you are willing to change your belief. Some 500 years ago most of what they called the "civilized world" was situated around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the western shores of Europe. They had found a place called the East Indies. In the East Indies you could get gold, silk, and spices; lots of goody goodies. But it took literally years get to the East Indies. They were trying to find a new trade route to the East Indies. Somebody asked "Is there any possibility that we can sail a ship there?" The answer was, "No dummy! Don't you know you can only sail as far as the northeast end of the Mediterranean Sea, and then you have to go by land?" Camelback, horseback, foot-back, however they traveled...that trip took years complete. "Well what would happen if we sailed in the other direction?" And they said, "Well idiot, don't you know if you sail that way you're going to fall off the edge of the earth!" In those days everyone thought the world was flat and if you sailed out there too far to the west you would sail off the edge of the earth. I don't know why they believed that, but I assume it was because some people who sailed out there, didn't come back, and they just thought they had sailed off the edge. Wouldn't it be great if the

world was flat? We could take all this environmental junk and trash out there and go push it overboard off the edge and be done with it!

Now here's Columbus, and we believe that Columbus had to be an alcoholic because if you're going to believe differently than the entire world and everybody in it and you're going to stand there and express that belief; you are going to have to be tougher than hell to do it! Many times if you express a belief different than what everybody else believes they would burn you at the stake or hang you from a tree, or cut your head off or something. But Columbus was tough enough and bullheaded enough to be able to stand there and say, "I believe that the world is round: I do not believe it's flat". Then he made one of the most drunken statements the world has ever heard, he said, "I believe we can get to the East by sailing west." Now if that isn't drunk thinking I don't know what is! Many of his mannerisms indicated Columbus was an alcoholic:

- When he left he didn't know where he was going.
- When he got there he didn't know where he was.
- When he got back he didn't even know where he had been.
- But what really made him an alcoholic was a woman financed the whole trip for him; twice!

Columbus followed a formula; a little formula that the world has always known and used: To change anything at all, there are certain things that have to take place.

The first thing you have to do in order to change anything is to be willing to change.

Circumstances are what make us willing. Trying to find the new trade route to the East Indies is what made Columbus willing to change. **The second thing you have to do to change anything is to believe you can.** Columbus said, "I believe that the world is round, not flat, and I believe you can get to the East by sailing west." But his belief wasn't enough because he was still standing on the shore of the ocean the day he expressed that belief. Some days, weeks, months, years later he did **the third thing, he made a decision**. He said "By golly I'm going to go find out whether this thing is round or flat. Can you really get to the East by sailing west?" But his decision wasn't enough either, because he was still standing on the shore of the ocean the day he made that decision. Some days, weeks, months, years later he did **the fourth thing you have to do, he started taking action**.

The first thing Columbus did is he went to the King of Portugal to get the money. But the King of Portugal being a very astute businessman said, "There's no way I'm going to let you have this money because you'll sail out there and sail right off the edge of this sucker and I'll lose it all". He didn't give up and then went to see the Queen of Spain. Columbus sweet-talked her and promised that he would bring back gold, silk, spices, and the 'goody goodies' of life. She gave him the money. He bought three ships, hired crew members and loaded those ships with provisions for the trip. Then they set sail and began to go east by sailing west...sailing west, day, after day, after day. Now we don't know for sure, but we have a suspicion that on that first trip he hired a special sailor and put him on the bow of the lead ship at night with a lantern and whispered in his ear, "I believe this thing is round, but if you see the edge of this damn thing you holler so we can get turned around in time!"

Now, after sailing due west for several days, they got results. They found land on the other side, which was the result of the action that they had taken. Columbus thought it was the East Indies. It wasn't; it was the West Indies, but he had proven to himself that the world is not flat, it is round, and you won't sail off the edge of it. He turned around and went back to Europe, right back to the Queen of Spain, and she asked, "Columbus, where's the gold, silk and spices you promised you

would bring me?" He said, "Sweetheart I'm sorry but I didn't find any. Tell you what I'll do; if you will refinance me I'll go back. Trust me honey. Please? This time I'll find it!" She re-financed him and he got some more ships, more provisions, more crew members and began to go east by sailing west with one big difference; the second trip he didn't hire the lookout and put him on the bow of the lead ship at night. **This time he went back on faith; he went back on knowledge. The first time he went on belief.**

You can't start with faith. The only things you can do are:

- **start with belief (Step Two)**
- **make the decision (Step Three)**
- **take the action (Steps Four through Eleven)**
- **get the results and then you will have faith**

I would love to sit here and tell you today that the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are brand new and that the world has never seen anything like them before, but if I did, I would be telling you a lie. Because the Twelve Steps are based on the same identical formula that Columbus and any other human being has ever used to change anything.

The first thing we have to do in order to recover from alcoholism is to be willing to change, and that's what **Step One gives us; the willingness. As soon as we can see that what we are doing is no longer going to work, then we become willing to change. The second thing we have to do is to believe we can; that's **Step Two**. But that belief will do us no good unless we make a decision about it; that's **Step Three**. However, that decision will do us no good unless we take the action, and those are **Steps Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, and Eleven**. The result of the actions are that **we too will get results**, just as it says in the first part of Step Twelve; "Having had a spiritual awakening, **as the result of these steps...**" **we now have faith. We now have knowledge. We no longer just believe.****

You see, I don't just believe that God will restore me to sanity; having worked the Steps, I *know* He will, because He has done so (first part of Step Twelve).

Those of us who have been restored to sanity and now have faith; can now help:

- The next newcomer come to **believe** (Step Two)
- They can make a **decision** (Step Three)
- We take them by the hand and walk with them through the **action steps** (Steps Four through Eleven)
- Then they will get **results**, have a spiritual awakening, and they will know (first part of Step Twelve)
- Then they can go help the next newcomer come to **believe** (second part of Step Twelve)

There is only one thing we can't do for the newcomer: **We cannot make them willing** (Step One). That's a job they have to work on themselves.

How does an alcoholic become willing to change?

Very simple...drink lots of alcohol! I hear people come to AA and they say "I've been working on Step One for three years in AA" and I say, "No you haven't!" **You don't work on Step One (willingness) in AA. You work on Step One out there... and when you have drunk enough, when you just can't stand it any longer, then you become willing to change.** Then we can begin to help you by helping you come to believe, decide, act, and have a spiritual awakening.

It's the same formula that the world has always used to change the status of anything. Now if,

- **I know I need the Power**
- **I know the beginning of the finding of the Power is just to believe**
- **I know the procedure (formula) to follow to find the Power**

I only need to know one more thing: Where am I going to find that Power?

READ: Page 51, paragraph 2 → page 55, Top of page

Again, we see another illustration of the **power of believing** and how this **power is used**. There are other illustrations throughout the book. Bill talks about electricity. Electricity is a power greater than us. We can harness it. We know how to generate electricity, but we don't know that much about it. They say it's a force of undetermined origin. We don't really know where electricity comes from or where it begins. **I think this is like the Power we receive from God**. Like great powers and all the powers in our universe, we don't know where they exist. But, *we don't have to know about them to use them*. Bill talks about the Wright brothers. How can a bicycle mechanic **believe** he can build an airplane? But they did believe. The Wright brothers went out and they believed, and they made a decision, and they took the thing out and a lot of times they crashed, but **they didn't stop**. If you fail, if you believe and you make a decision and you fail, it's real simple: All you have to do is change what you believe. **Change** your decision and you'll finally get it right. And that's what they did and finally they got the thing to fly.

We are the only ones that can allow limitations in our lives. **Whatever we believe, we become**. So be careful if you believe some bad stuff. You had better watch it because it's going to be a part of your life. If we want to **change bad beliefs to good beliefs**, we will have to **change our minds** and begin **to believe differently**. This is what we read in the "**Spiritual Experience**" on page 567.

I think this little story about the Wright brothers was put in here to show us, that most of us were Agnostics. Since most of us believed in God, but couldn't prove it we had to take a chance. That little story shows us that proof is not always right. I found in my life that any Power greater than human power can't really be proven one way or another. Only **the results of our actions will prove it**. God is the same way: I don't have to understand God and you don't have to prove it to me to be able to find the Power. Now, if **I know I need the Power, I know the beginning is the belief**, and if **I know the formula** to find it, the only thing left I have to know is where that power is. My book is complete - it gives me everything I need to have. On page 55, it tells me where to find that **Power**.

READ: Page 55 paragraph 1 → page 57, to the end of Chapter 4

I think *The Big Book* is telling me that **God dwells within me**. I think today that every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth has some form of knowledge inside themselves, and that form of knowledge seems to be able to tell us what we should do and what we should not do. It seems to be able to tell us the difference between right and wrong. It seems to be able to tell us how we should and should not live. What most of us have done in our chase for money, power, prestige and sex, is we have disregarded that knowledge, pushed it inside ourselves and obscured it.

But now, we begin to operate on a **conscious knowledge of the mind to satisfy our wants, needs, and desires**. I think some people want to call that knowledge "common sense." Others might want to refer to it as a conscience and surely some would call it the soul. Still others call it innate intelligence. I don't really feel it makes much difference what we call it as long as we recognize the fact that it is there. I've had evidence of this in my life and you have too. Sometimes I was getting ready to do something and some voice from somewhere would say to me, "I don't think you ought to do that", and I wouldn't pay any attention to it. I'd go right ahead and do it. And I'd just get into a hell-of-a shape. And then that same voice would say, "See, I told you not to do it." It's been a part of me all my life.

Remember, in the Appendix II it talked about tapping into an unsuspected inner resource of strength that we might want to identify with a Power greater than ourselves or God as we understand Him. If God dwells within me, and I believe He does, then **He dwells within you**. It also means we can have a personal God. I don't have to worry anymore whether it's hellfire, damnation or brimstone. If He dwells within me, then He's my own personal God. This has given me **a completely new concept of God, as I understand Him**. It has changed my understanding of God from hellfire and brimstone to an entirely different kind of God. It has given me a simple little procedure that if I will follow it, I will be able to find that Power and I don't have to know anything - all I have to do is believe, and decide, and act. Then I'll get results. Then I can go back and help the next person "come to believe". I don't believe we could make our decision without this chapter. Most spiritual things you read will try to prove God to you. This chapter doesn't do that. It gives you a procedure that if you will follow it, God will prove Himself as the results of what you get from following this procedure.

This is some of the greatest information I have ever learned:

- **I can have my own personal God**
- **He dwells within me**
- **My knowledge comes from and through Him**
- **I will be able to find that Power!**

Am I ready to make a decision? You bet! When He was the God of justice, when He was hellfire and brimstone, I wasn't ready to make that decision. But throughout this chapter my concept of God has changed entirely. I'm beginning to believe He just might be a kind and loving God, and just maybe He will start doing some good things for me, not hellfire and brimstone. Now I am ready to make a decision. I don't think it is by accident that the very next chapter is titled 'How It Works'. Now Bill sits down and he writes the chapter 'How it Works' which contains some of the best spiritual information the world has ever seen...a little formula...a set of proposals...

Bill called them, the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

THE BIG BOOK WORKSHOP HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

*****NOTE: It is suggested that the homework be done soon after the workshop meeting and then reviewed with your sponsor before the next workshop meeting.**

- 1) In your notebook write what you can believe about a Power greater than yourself. On another page write what you cannot believe about God. As you go forward from this point, it will be those things that you believe or which fit your conception of God that you will be using. You can be comforted in knowing that "our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him." (*The Big Book*, page 46)
- 2) Read Chapter 5, "**How It Works**" (p58 - p63) in *The Big Book* (1st Time) – USE HIGHLIGHTER (Just read and highlight the 1st time you read through the chapter.)
- 3) Read Chapter 5, "**How It Works**" (p58 - p63) in the "*The Big Book*" (2nd Time).
Answer the "Work Assignment Questions" below as you read the chapter for the 2nd time.
- 4) Be prepared to discuss the material in Chapter 5, page 58 to 63 (i.e. through the part that concludes Step Three)

WORK ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS "HOW IT WORKS"

*Always answer in
complete sentences
and write an example !!!*

PAGE 60

1. Do you question whether you are capable of being honest with yourself?
(If you do have questions you're not capable of being honest with yourself, yet.)

NOTE: *The state of mind you are asked to have when you start the steps is: honesty, fearlessness, thoroughness and a willingness to go to any length.*

2. What do half measures avail us?
3. Are you convinced that a life run on self-will can hardly be a success?
4. Can you see the effects of self-centeredness in your life?
5. Have you been self-centered? (*List examples of your self-centeredness in your notebook.*)

PAGE 62

1. Did you know that you could not reduce self-centeredness by wishing or trying your own will power?
2. Are you willing to make the decisions set forth at the bottom of page 62?

PAGE 63

Take note of the promises that follow as the result of taking of Step Three (described at the top of page 63)

1. Are you willing to take this step?