

WEEK #4 – MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM - Leader Notes

{OPTIONAL REVIEW OF LAST WEEK}

Last week we looked at little picture “What is the Solution?” On the left-hand side of the picture we saw the fellowship, which supports us. We saw where the older members through the sharing of their experience, strength and hope with the newcomer, provides enough support for the newcomer to be able to stay sober for a period of time. By the way, it’s a two way street. As we older members support the new member we draw strength from that too. There is great strength in the fellowship. It would be almost impossible to be in AA today for very long and not begin to believe that there is some Power greater than human power working, for when you hear countless hundreds of people saying: “It’s only by the grace of God”; or “because of God as I understand Him”; or “because of the Power greater than I am I haven’t found it necessary to take a drink”.

You can hardly hear that over and over and over and not begin to believe there is some Power working within this thing. The instant the newcomer begins to believe that, it opens their mind, and they become willing to investigate. And upon investigation we find that simple “kit of spiritual tools” that is laid at our feet, the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. As we work and apply those steps in our lives we undergo a personality change sufficient to recover from alcoholism. We find a Power greater than human power. When that happens to us, we then have become older members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Now we can go back to the left-hand side of the sheet and we can help support the next newcomer and help them work their program so they can have a spiritual experience also.

The Big Book plainly states that you can not give something away that you haven’t got. Now somewhere down the line when they quit working the program out of the book, then in self-defense they starting measuring success by, how long have you been sober rather than by the quality of that sobriety. In the beginning everybody was expected to work the program, have a spiritual experience. If they didn’t want to do that they were told you might as well leave here because we can’t help you if you don’t to that. So our older membership was based on **quality of sobriety** rather than **quantity of sobriety**.

Now today, you see all kinds of people in AA. You see some that have been in here maybe 6 months. They’ve got a good sponsor. They got immediately into the program. They have worked the steps, they have had a spiritual awakening, and they’re always laughing, cutting up, having fun, always helping AA and doing what they can for other alcoholics. They are a delight to behold and you just love to be around them. Only sober 6 months. You’ve got others that have been in the 6-8-10 years. Treated it like a cafeteria. Took some but left what they didn’t want. Now they’re better than they used to be, but, you never know what kind of shape they’re going to be in when you run into them. One day they’re up, the next day they’re down. They’re kind of like a yo-yo going back and forth. Then you see some people that have been in here 15-16-18-20 years. Never worked a step and damn proud of it. And they’re the ones that say, “By God, if you want what we’ve got, you better be willing to go to any damn lengths to get it”. Now some of those guys feel so bad you’d like to buy them a drink. You know they would feel better with a drink! So we are NOT talking about quantity of sobriety here. We’re talking about quality of sobriety.

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{BEGIN WEEK #4 READING}

Only those that have had the spiritual experience can help another have a spiritual experience. You simply can't give away something you don't have. I can imagine Bill running all this through his mind. And he probably says to himself: "They're not going to like this idea of a spiritual experience any more than I did." You remember he had an aversion to these things. He and Ebby argued about this for a long time. And I think Bill says "**I need to tell them just exactly what's going to happen to them if they don't have this spiritual experience.**" So he writes another chapter and he called it 'MORE ABOUT ALCOHOLISM', and in this chapter he talks about one thing and one thing only. He talks about **the insanity of alcoholism.**

You know, **Step 2 says, "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."** Well if we've got to be restored to sanity, that indicates we must be insane. Many alcoholics are highly offended when you bring this up. They say "Oh don't tell me I'm insane. Sure, I do some pretty crazy, stupid things when drinking but when I'm sober I'm much like normal people." Other alcoholics say "Well I don't have any trouble with this insanity idea because I remember the crazy, stupid things I did while drinking." In either case they are referring to **the stupid things we do while drunk. NO, that's not insanity.** The stupid things we do while drunk are caused by a mind that is filled with alcohol which lowers the inhibitions, and if your mind is filled with something that lowers your inhibitions, look out! You are going to do some pretty crazy stupid things all right. That's why they give all that free booze away at casinos! That's not caused by insanity, that's caused by alcohol itself. In order for us to understand this, we finally had to go back to the dictionary again and to look up the word 'sanity', and it's defined in the dictionary as:

Sanity - wholeness of mind or completeness of mind

If your mind is whole, if your mind is complete, that means you can see the truth about everything around you and you will normally then make decisions based on truth and life turns out to be pretty good. An insane mind is one that is less than whole. A mind that is less than whole cannot always see the truth about everything around it. Sometimes the insane mind makes a decision based upon a lie and then life becomes pretty lousy. To be insane does not mean you're crazy. If you're crazy that means you've lost more than half your marbles, and you have got to be locked up somewhere to protect you and society from you. That's craziness. But insanity is just less than whole.

I think one of the best ways I know to illustrate it is to imagine a pie and set it here in front of us. Let's cut that pie into ten pieces. You come along and I give you a piece of pie. My pie is now "less than whole" but I've still got 90% of it. Somebody else comes along and I give them a piece of pie. My pie is now even more, "less than whole", but I still have 80% of it. **Insanity does not mean you are all gone. It just means you're not quite all here.**

When it comes to alcohol, from time to time, it seems as though we are not quite all here... **we can't always see the truth about alcohol... we make a decision based upon a lie, then we run into the truth and life becomes an absolute living hell.** So let's look within the mind of we alcoholics just before we take the first drink... Stone cold sober...

Can we or can we not see the truth?

If we can see the truth, we're sane. If we can't, we're insane.

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In 'Chapter 3 – More About Alcoholism', Bill is going to show us this by a series of examples. He's going to give us 'the man of 30', he's going to look at 'Jim', he's going to look at the 'jaywalker' and he's going to look at 'Fred'. With each example, we are going to look into their mind to see if we can or cannot see the truth about alcohol.

Chapter 3 is called 'More About Alcoholism'. It could just as easily be called 'More Truth About Alcoholism'. I've heard all my life, if you know the truth, the truth will set you free. Therefore if you're not free, it's because you don't know the truth. This chapter should give me more truth so I can base my life upon truth rather than upon things that are not true.

[Read: Page 30, Paragraph 1 → Page 30, Paragraph 2]

In these two paragraphs Bill has used four different words that all mean the same thing. He said, ***“The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker.”*** Now we know an **obsession** is an idea that is so strong it can make you believe something that's not true. It can make you believe a lie.

“The persistence of this illusion is astonishing.” We know what an illusionist is. An illusionist is a magician. And they can stand in front of you and with slight of hand and a few props they can make you believe something that is not true. So an **illusion** also means to believe something that is not true or to believe a lie.

“Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death.” Insanity is to believe something that is not true. In the next paragraph he said, ***“The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.”*** Delusion means the same thing. **If you've deluded yourself, it means you've come to believe something that is not true.**

So you may see Bill using any one of four terms: **Obsession; Illusion; Insanity; Delusion**. All four mean exactly the same thing: **“to believe something that is not true”; or “to believe a lie”**.

READ: Page 30, Paragraph 3 → Page 33, Paragraph 1

Now we know the truth to be this:

“Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic”

We've never seen one single case where one of us was able to go back to successful drinking... to believe anything different than that is to believe something that is not true, or to believe a lie. This guy believed that after 25 years of sobriety he could now drink like normal people. Now based upon that belief he took a drink, triggered the allergy, couldn't stop...four years later he's dead. Now is his real problem the fact that he has a physical allergy to alcohol or a form of insanity that tells him it's OK to drink alcohol after 25 years of sobriety? **The real problem is centered in our mind telling us we can drink, rather than in our body, that ensures that we can't drink.**

[Read: page 33, paragraph 2 → page 35, paragraph 1]

{-- JIM --}

{Leader Comment: Now we're going to look in old Jim's mind just before he gets drunk and we're going to see whether he is sane or insane. Continue reading...}

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[Page 35, paragraph 2 → p 37, Paragraph 2]

In this story we get to look at Jim's mind just before he gets drunk and we can see the switch from sane to insane thinking. Jim is a typical alcoholic, isn't he? They told him about Step 1... the physical allergy, the obsession of the mind, the powerless condition. They told him about **Step 2... that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity**. A little later on the Big Book it says, **Step 3 is just a beginning**. So apparently Jim took steps 1, 2 and 3 and immediately things started to get better for him. But Jim failed to enlarge his spiritual life. The book is going to tell us that **the only way we enlarge on Step 3, is steps 4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11 and 12** ... Jim didn't do Steps 4-12. Jim only did Steps 1, 2 and 3. (The A.A. waltz)

Jim got drunk six times in a row. Each time they went over there and worked with him, carefully reviewing what had happened. (*You get drunk six times in a row today and they probably won't have anything to do with you.*) He got drunk again. They said, "My God Jim this is seven times in a row! Let's don't go through this any more. You sit down here and you tell us exactly how this has happened." On page 36 we see where Jim was sane and then we see where he was insane.

We read this book for years before we saw this. "I came to work on Tuesday morning." Where was he all day Monday? We alcoholics are bad about Mondays. I think any of us that had to be a salesman for a concern we once owned, would probably be a little irritated by having to work at the place we once owned. That's normal sane thinking. Then the boss probably said "Hey Jim, by the way, where were you all day yesterday anyhow?" Not too serious but just enough to irritate him. A little restless, a little irritable a little discontented. What's more normal than if you're a car salesman, you want to get away from the shop for a while, drive out in the country, see somebody that we already know that we're trying to sell a car to. That would be normal sane thinking for an alcoholic car salesman. It's certainly normal, if you're hungry, to stop at a roadside place to get a sandwich. The fact that there is a bar there is beside the point. We have no intention of drinking. We're hungry... we're going to get a sandwich... normal sane thinking for an alcoholic car salesman. We're not going in there to drink. We've eaten there many times during the months we were sober. We're going to go in there, get a sandwich and maybe sell a car while we're in there... normal sane thinking for an alcoholic car salesman. It is normal then to sit down at a table to order a sandwich and a glass of milk... normal sane thinking for an alcoholic car salesman. Now if you're hungry enough there's nothing wrong with two sandwiches and two glasses of milk. That would be normal sane thinking for an alcoholic car salesman... two sandwiches... two glasses of milk. Now comes the squiggly writing. That's italic.

Big Book p. 36, par 2 ***"Suddenly the thought crossed my mind that if I were to put an ounce of whiskey in my milk it couldn't hurt me on a full stomach."***

This is absolute insanity! For this guy to believe that he can take whisky, mix it with milk and take it on a full stomach and it won't hurt him. Now based on that insane idea, he makes a decision and takes some action. We take the first drink... Now we've got it inside of ourselves... The physical allergy takes over... Now we can't stop. If you were looking for a definition of insanity that would be it right there. **How can the lack of proportion of the ability to think straight be called anything else?** Now is Jim's real problem the fact that he has physical allergy to alcohol OR that he has a form of insanity that tells him it's OK to drink alcohol mixed with milk on a full stomach?

The real problem is centered in the mind telling us we can drink, rather than the body, that ensures that we can not.

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{-- JAYWALKER --}

Bill's next example is the "jaywalker". Now I don't understand this guy at all. But I can see him out here on the interstate, waiting for a truck or bus to come down through there. He jumps out in front of it, spins around two or three times to how close it can come to him without actually hitting him. For some reason he gets a thrill out of it. Don't understand him but I can see him doing it.

[READ: Page 37, paragraph 3 → page 39, paragraph 1]

I think that's so appropriate today. You know, because of awareness, education and the justice system, many people are getting to AA before they have to lose everything. Now you might see them come in here still married and still have job. They may even still have a car, but I bet they lost their drivers license! When we start talking to those people about insanity they say "Hey, don't tell me I'm crazy! I haven't lost anything! I've got my job. I've got my blah blah blah". NO... we're not talking about that at all. We are talking about one thing and one thing only:

Can we or can we not see the truth about alcohol?

If we can we are sane, if we can't then we are insane.

Now for the low bottom drunk like Jim, it's probably easier for him to see his insanity because he lost everything that he had. For a high bottom drunk that hasn't lost a lot of stuff, sometimes it's a little more difficult for them to see it. But I will tell you this, **whether you are low bottom or high bottom, if you get drunk, you're going to get drunk the same way by believing something that is not true.**

[Read P 39, Paragraph 2 → Page 43, to the end of chapter]

{-- FRED --}

Fred is the opposite of Jim. Fred is high bottom. Fred never lost anything. Jim didn't feel too good the day he got drunk. Fred is on top of the world the day he gets drunk, yet he got drunk the same way. He believed a lie. Let's look at Fred's state of mind again: *Big Book p. 40 "I was much impressed with what you fellows said about alcoholism, but I frankly did not believe it would be possible for me to drink again. I somewhat appreciated your ideas about the subtle insanity which precedes the first drink, but I was confident it could not happen to me after what I had learned. I reasoned I was not so far advanced as most of you fellows, that I had been usually successful in licking my other personal problems, that I would therefore be successful where you men failed. I felt I had every right to be self-confident, that it would be only a matter of exercising my will power and keeping on guard. In this frame of mind, I went about my business and for a time all was well. I had no trouble refusing drinks, and began to wonder if I had not been making too hard work of a simple matter."*

We think Fred began to get drunk right here. He began to say "Ah this staying sober is easy... nothing to this!" Now is Fred's real problem the fact that he has a physical allergy to alcohol or that he has a form of insanity that tells him it's OK to have a couple of cocktails with dinner?

The real problem is centered in the mind telling us we can drink, rather than in the body, that ensures we can not.

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You know Rowland had the same idea that self-knowledge would fix it. Even Bill had the idea that self-knowledge would fix it and here Fred had the idea that self-knowledge would fix it. Bill is trying to show us that **they ALL had the obsession of the mind**. Bill just took us through all these examples to say:

Big Book p. 43, par 3 ***“Once more: the alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defence against the first drink. Except in a few rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defence. His defence must come from a Higher Power.”***

That’s it... that IS the solution

- You can’t heal a sick mind with a sick mind.
- Self-knowledge won’t cut it, the more we try to think our way out it, the deeper into it we get.
- It must come from a Higher Power... our defense must come from a Higher Power.

Notice he didn’t say “the practicing alcoholic” or “the drinking alcoholic”. He just said the alcoholic. Now what that means to me today is that **I have no effective mental defense against the first drink. Left on my own resources, invariably I’m going to go right back to drinking again, without the aid of a Power greater than human power.**

Now if you’re the kind of alcoholic that I am, and if you were raised in a similar church setting that I was, by the end of Chapter 3 you are now faced with a huge dilemma. Bill has convinced me in Chapter 3, without the aid of a Power greater than me, I’m going back to drinking. But I also felt that even though that was true, it wouldn’t be possible for me to get the aid of a Power greater than I am. What I remember hearing about God when I was growing up and in church was hellfire and brimstone and that I was going to hell for lying and cheating and stealing and drinking whiskey and committing adultery. By the time I got to AA I had been doing that for many years. I felt that if God had anything to do with me it wouldn’t be anything good. It would certainly be something bad.

I remember so clearly when I separated from God. My church gave me the rules. They said if you do this, this and this you’ll be OK. If you do that, that and that you’re going to hell. Now I didn’t have any trouble with the rules at all, until one day it seemed to me that they looked me straight in the eye and said “To think about doing it is just as bad as doing it”. And I said, “Oh crap! I’ve had it now!” Because I’d been thinking about doing it for a long time! I thought to myself “If you are going to hell for thinking about it, then you might as well just go ahead and do it”. So I did. But I didn’t go to hell immediately, and in my mind I said “They have been lying to me all along! This is a conspiracy to keep me from having any fun! From this day on I do not intend to pay any attention to what they have to say. I don’t have any intention of following God’s rules, their rules or anybody else’s rules. From this day on I’m going to do it my way. I’m going to do whatever I want whenever I want and if they don’t like it, so be it.” Now when I got to AA, I had that same attitude. When I first walked into AA I had that same spiritual knowledge of God. No wonder we have trouble with this God thing when we get to AA. Anybody else ever have those kinds of feelings about God and people?

I think Bill recognized this. I think he said, “Sooner or later I’m going to have to ask these people to make a decision about God”. And I think he said in his mind that “They are not going to be able to make that decision based upon old ideas.” That’s what I had when I got here, old ideas. And I think he said, “I believe I need to give them some new information about God”. Where they might be able to discard some old ideas, pick up some new ideas, and then they’ll be able to make a decision about this God thing.

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To help us with this dilemma, Bill wrote another chapter in the Big Book called, **“We Agnostics”**, which I think is one of the greatest pieces of spiritual information I’ve ever read in my life. As I read that chapter and studied it, I could see where some of my old ideas, old prejudices about God and religion, were wrong. When I could see where my old ideas were wrong then I could discard them, and I could accept some new ideas about God and then I could make a decision. Not based on hellfire and brimstone but based on a God of justice... there was no way could I have ever made the decision about God until I tossed aside my old prejudices about God and accepted some new ideas. Thank God for Chapter 4. Let’s look at just a little bit of it just before leave tonight.

Dr. Carl Jung told Rowland Hazard about ideas, emotions and attitudes. That’s what we’re going to be looking at now. Ideas, emotions and attitudes, which were the guiding force of the lives of these people, are suddenly cast to one side. Most certainly the ideas, emotions and attitudes that I had toward God were that of a child. I couldn’t accept it then, I couldn’t accept it later, I couldn’t accept it when I got here and I can’t accept it today because I need new ideas and emotions and attitudes about this. I needed new information.

Chapter 4 – We Agnostics... lets break down the title so we can understand it better... just the word “agnostic” means something to me. The root of the word **“nostic”** means **“knowledge”**, the first part **“ag”** means **“without”**, put the **“ag”** in front of it and you get **“agnostic”** or **“without knowledge”**. Therefore, **“We Agnostics”** means **“Those of us who are without knowledge.”** That was me alright, and the knowledge that I did have was not good. Bill had the same experiences that we did. When Ebby presented him with the solution he was aghast at that solution. Some of us are aghast at that solution also. Bill said “When they talked of a God personal to me my mind became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such theories.” And certainly that’s the way many of us reacted. Later on in the Big Book it tells us that “...when the spiritual malady is overcome we straighten out mentally and physically.” Hmmm, “...the spiritual malady...”

The understanding of “God of my understanding”

When that is straightened out, we will straighten out mentally and physically. The next chapter, We Agnostic, is an attempt to do that.