

Coming events

Common Grounds



OREGON AREA 58 MAY ASSEMBLY NEWSLETTER

NEXT ASSEMBLY

SEPTEMBER 18, 19, 20 MC MINNVILLE, OR

Thank you for your honest and courageous words. My sediment exactly. I am a senior sober member deeply entrenched in my community. I have continued to push forward to have meetings at our meeting hall bearing threats of closing the hall. What I see in the people who are willing to attend with great attention being placed on sanitation of the tables and all objects to get touched, only one person handling the coffee pot and social distancing at the tables we're limiting the number of people to 10. Every day at noon I see three young women off the streets terrified fighting for their recovery. These ladies plus one other gentleman also in his 20s fighting for their life. These ladies and this man have nowhere else to go and I see the desperation in them that was in me in the beginning. It is very difficult to turn my back on them and hide in my house when I believe my health is good enough and my recovery is strong enough and my faith in my higher power is great enough to face this demon. I am working from home and it is the only place I go outside of the grocery store. When our state finds it necessary to keep open liquor stores and cannabis businesses, I see no reason not to hold some form have a connected meeting for those new members in the most desperate need. I also find it interesting that three members of our group that have been regularly attending the noon meeting fall into the over 60 with underlying issues. Many of them are also newer in their recovery. They have given reasoned thought To the risk involved versus the liferaft that is present in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Their choice is attendance. I feel as a leader in Alcoholics

Anonymous now with 36 years of dedicated and committed membership that there be no reason I should not be permitted to help these people from a position of one of those who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.

I'm not trying to push my thoughts off on other people but for me in the light of my circumstances I take into consideration the responsibility statement. I am healthy I am strong and I have recovery and the hand of AA is in need right now and I am responsible to make it available.

We're holding a business meeting next Saturday to close our hall. We are in a small town in eastern Oregon with minimal exposure to the virus. I understand that it is a growing threat but so is alcoholism. These young members stand with their life before them and they need support. It's not only a matter of life and death but in my view It cannot be forgotten the lives that will be changed by these people making it through and having a new life like I have been given. Someone was there for me at the age of 22 years old and this program has changed my entire life experience and this that my life touches inside and outside of meetings and our community. The sacrifice that those people made in those early days made such an influence on me that I have been committed through the years to give back what I have been so freely given by the people who came before me.

SPONSORSHIPS IN TIMES OF NEED

Thank God for sponsors through fearful times like these. It always amazes how my sponsor gives me a new understanding on every situation I bring to him. Going through uncertain times it is easy for me to resist change and rely on my ideas to get me through. Humility calls me to be of maximum service to God and others in the present, no matter the conditions I am in. When I resist change I do so through my thought process. For me going to meetings online I resist. I haven't reached a point of desperation to make me want to change my views on that. My thought process tells me I am "Old School" type. I got sober before cell phones were on the scene. I would much sooner talk than text because of my experience. To me I can read into a text more than it says. I attribute this to the signs I take for granted hearing somebody's voice. The sound, how the words are said, excitement or not, anger or compassion I can hear through the sound of a voice. Texting, I try to add these factors when I read a text, and that a lot of times that detracts from my serenity.

Talking with my sponsor moved me to another level of understanding about the online meetings. One thing he said was that God has prepared all of us for this place in time to be the best equipped to be of service to God and others. I have to learn to use all of the tools at my disposal to implement this principle in my life. Our books say's I have to be willing to let go of my old ideas.

For me I can think of a lot of reasons to avoid online meetings. The first being the spiritual factor of meeting in person, the physical contact. To me there is something about my level of honesty when I am physically around someone. It brings to the surface what I am trying to hide from myself just being around people I can see myself in. I read once that God gives me people as my mirrors. If I look closely enough, I can see myself in all people. Because I am good at hiding myself from myself. I need these fearful times to look more closely at what I am trying to hide. Fear in the process of my thinking.

Fear is what I am facing and I can justify it in a hundred different ways. The world is always changing, and I want to hold on to the illusion that I have some type of control through my choices. For me the only control my choices give me is the opportunity for God to lead me into His will. In the short term this can be very painful because letting go of my old ideas is always painful. For me it is dying to self or getting rid of things that have attached me to my way of thinking. I am still fearful of being the hole in the donut. What my mind does to me, is to block the understanding that God is also the whole in the donut.

Pretty simple in my area of analytical thinking, but this happens in the spiritual area which I don't have any control over. In times like these I have to refocus on the principle of surrender. This is where an inventory is critical, I cannot something I don't know is there. Most of my fear is buried deep down inside of my innermost self. For me I don't think fear comes and goes with the situations I am dealing with. I think it is always inside of me no matter what I am going through. Changing situations in my life, change how I can honestly look at myself to see the fear I try to hide by my thinking. Fear is always there for me although a lot of the time I don't recognize it because of the cloak my thinking hides it behind. It takes me situations where I can feel the discomfort to spur me on to look inside to see what's there. When this happens at first, I resist or try to solve the discomfort with my analytical thinking coupled with my past experience. When I have exhausted my resources, I am humbled once again. Only then can I see the simplicity of the problem and go to the One that has the power to help me let go of a little more fear.

Another thing I am grateful for is a sponsor who leads me with wisdom. He works with me in such a way that what I seeking, I get the opportunity to discover myself. He lives the line "we have to quit playing God." He is a living example of the gaunt prospector discovering the pearl that we have to give all the gold away that we discover.

Going back to my sponsor said, that God prepared for this exact moment in time. I have to ask myself these questions. What is God's will me now? Is fear keeping from checking out online meetings? Am I practicing love and tolerance for others? Am I considering other's views when I make my decisions of how I deal with crisis? How can I better use all the tools God has supplied me with? Am I letting fear keep me from doing anything? How can live fully the fifth tradition, which states "carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers?" How much do I want to use this crisis to get me closer to my higher power?

We have all been supplied with the tools we need to get through this crisis. It is now our job to inventory our tools and put them to good use. I close with a story of something I did in my past. I believe it was the Thanksgiving Holiday and God gave me the idea of calling everyone's number I had in my phone from AA. I supposed I had around thirty numbers at that time. After calling everyone, four hours has passed like the blink of eye and I just spent all that time in tears of joy. That brings me to the last question. I know the action works through experience, why do I resist what I know works?

The Lousy, No Good Business Meeting

I walked with trepidation into the second business meeting of the year with one of my home groups, a speaker/discussion topic meeting. I didn't want to be there but felt I was responsible as a regular attendee. The man who had said—"There are no rules in A.A."—a fellow group member was back again. I could tell he felt grumpy and argumentative as we waited for everyone to join us. The informal nature of our business meetings did not give us an agenda therefore our meetings functioned more like a group conscience.

"I have an issue I want to bring up," he started. "The last two weeks we had a round robin type of discussion, where one person picks another to speak and so on. You can't talk unless you get picked. I had some newcomers come up to me after the meeting and ask if we always did it that way. I said no. We need to make sure it doesn't happen again, or the meeting may fold." He went on to talk about a couple meetings that disbanded which he thought was because others were not free to share in a round robin meeting environment. He clinched the vote by saying he wrote to GSO years ago and they said not to do that style of meeting. I asked for names and facts. He provided none.

I should mention that this man shared for five minutes at every meeting. He wanted air time. To my surprise, his fear-based request to disallow round robins met with agreement from other group members. Apparently, they didn't like round robins either or maybe they were afraid of him. I voted against the measure, but not with emotional sobriety. I threw his words back in his face in the time allotted to minority opinion. It didn't matter. We now had a rule thanks to Mr. 'A.A.-has-no-rules.'

Leaving the meeting I noticed my solar plexus felt like I had done fifty sit-ups. Since I know the mid-belly is the seat of personal power I surmised I had really wanted to control the outcome. I had attempted to "exercise" my power. I don't like feeling angry at other

group members. The outcome of the business meeting didn't matter as much as my spiritual condition.

So, as we do in A.A., I took the problem inside and to my Higher Power. What does the program tell me? That pain is the touchstone of all spiritual development and that if I think there is a problem with another person, I need to look at me, not them.

I also remembered that the best way to deal with someone in the rooms or elsewhere is to practice love and tolerance through praying for them. Yuck. That was the last thing I wanted to do! Pray for a man living in fear? Oh. Well, of course. I absolutely needed to do that. So I prayed for him for two weeks and my negative feelings dissipated. It is interesting to note that he stopped coming to the meeting. I kept looking for him. He would have received an amends for my angry retort during the business meeting.

In the end, I did not truly care which way a chairperson decided to do that meeting as long as we kept to our primary purpose and practiced love and tolerance with each other. Since I know I can't control others there is only one person I can control—me. I might not always be loving and tolerant in the moment, but I'm willing to admit when I'm wrong. And work on being loving and tolerant again.

God spoke during the business meeting through the collective Higher Powers of each person present. I guess HP figures our A.A. group does need some rules. It always amazes me how something that seems lousy and no good ends up being the best thing for my spiritual growth.

Submitted by

Laura Chase, Portland, Oregon

Shut My Eyes, Say or Think Help

A shorter form of the 11th step

What do pages 43 and 256 in the Big Book have in common? I didn't always remember the page numbers, but I knew what was written there... because it kept me sober. It meant that message was in my heart.

The stories have always spoke to my heart. Typically, I feel that I walk beside a kindred spirit while I read the stories. I relate so much to each story; yes I relate to some stronger than others. They can be like a mini meeting. Each story shows practical application of what's in the first 164 pages.

I would like to share one example of what reading both the stories and the first 164 pages has meant to me. It took a one-two punch of memory from 43 and 256 to get me over some humps in sobriety where I could have drunk.

In Chapter 3, we learn more about alcoholism. The final paragraph of the chapter offers no escape from the writer's point. This spiritual stuff. "The alcoholic at certain times has **no effective mental defense against the first drink. Except in a few rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a Higher Power.**" (p. 43, BB)

At no time did I disagree with that assessment. No debate on my part. But just "How" can I do that? Read the eleventh step on pp. 85-88 BB and in the 12&12 over and over. I mean, yeah, do that, do other footwork, work with a sponsor, go to meetings, not drink. But I also don't debate, to myself, that this disease can hook me when I least expect it.

So I had my first punch—page 43—against the first drink. However I found my second punch, my knockout (KO) against the first drink, on page 256 (4th ed.), in the story The Man Who Mastered Fear (TMWMF). I first read TMTMF in the 2nd edition of the Big Book many years ago in another 12th step program. After I got sober in AA, I finally went on to the 3rd, and then the 4th edition in the Big Book. I guessed, probably rightly, that the reason our non-AA group had plenty of 2nd editions for the BB study on

Friday night, was that AA at the time had moved on to the 3rd edition. That timing worked for our non-AA group group—we dog-eared those 2nd edition books. That 2nd edition and the other non-AA 12th step group got me into AA.

The man in TMTMF details his decline in mental, physical, and emotional health. He details his road to recovery and meeting Bill and Bob. He details his road back. On his road back, he shares an experience that helps me to this day:

"I was in a perfectly happy frame of mind. I had been in AA a year and the last thing on my mind was a drink. There was a glass of sherry at my place. I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to reach out for it. **I shut my eyes and asked for help. In fifteen seconds or less, the feeling passed.**" (p.256, 4th ed.)

And there's the second punch for me... practical application of page 43. *Shut my eyes, say or think help. This has gotten me past at least four "OMG I'm going to drink" moments.*

My experience is that I don't have to be eloquent in praying (needing eloquence is an illusion to stop me from talking to God). Even if I'm mute, God can translate when he knows I want help—that is, when I know I can't do it myself and I'm up S__'s Creek.

Many options are in the books and in the rooms of AA. I'll use whatever I can... even if it seems "too simple." For this alcoholic, God had to let me know that when push comes to shove, I can do simple.

So to sum up, my spiritual tools for staying sober includes the one-two punch from pages 43 and 256 (4th ed.): *Shut my eyes, say or think help.*

By Molly M., Albany, OR

Author's note: Remember to Look to the Stories too—The Heart of Recovery Beats there also

MILL CREEK AA GROUP

NEWSLETTER

From the President Martin F.

I hope that everyone is well and staying connected with their Higher Power during these trying times. It can be difficult to be separated from our routines, friends and loved ones. I hope you are taking the time to call those people and appreciate all of the blessing you have in your life.

Step 5 and 6 are difficult to work through in the best of times, let alone when the world is in "crisis mode". I have found at different times in my life I am able to see the wrongs I have done to others (or myself) in different lights. Depending on where I am in my growth and maturity I am able to understand better how an action or words may have hurt someone. It's important to look back at topics and events you may have thought resolved or long forgotten to gain new perspective on your own behavior and how it has impacted others. This helps us to better use the toolbox of recovery that the A.A. program offers us.

Admitting these things and talking through them with a friend or sponsor is a healthy way to gain perspective and keep yourself from spinning off into your own web of nonsense. I can tell you how important I have found talking through my problems with a good friend, to often in my past I would spin myself up and lose sight of what was important to me. This builds, builds and compounds until you are living in a reality that you have fabricated out of your own shortcomings. A good friend will help to ask the right questions and give their life experience to help you find your path again. Alone we survive, together we thrive. Let's stop surviving and begin to thrive.

AA RECIPE

Here is a quick easy salsa recipe that I absolutely love and a huge hit at Potlucks and parties. Here is the link if you want to give credit: <https://mountainmamacooks.com/quick-and-easy-blender-salsa/print/16851/>. I make this monthly and have altered the recipe a little to my liking see below. If you want a meal then I can come up with something.

SALSA

INGREDIENTS

- 1– 14 oz can diced tomatoes
- 1– 10 oz can original Rotel
- 1/2 small red onion, roughly chopped
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and smashed
- 1/2–1 jalapeno, seeded or not (depends on how spicy you like it)
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- small to medium size handful of cilantro, washed
- juice of 1 lime

Put all the ingredients in the base of a food processor or good blender and pulse to combine for 30 seconds or so until all the ingredients are finely chopped and salsa is desired consistency. Taste for seasoning and adjust to taste. Serve with chips or over tacos. Enjoy immediately or make in advance and refrigerate overnight for best results .

SEMANTICS

I had a moment of clarity the morning of November 10, 1994 after waking up. There was a voice in my head saying, "Go TO TREATMENT." It was a voice with power and I could not say no to it. That started my journey in sobriety.

I knew I had problems because emotionally I just didn't want to live anymore. I had tried everything I knew but to no avail. So, God placed in a treatment center where my walk began. I was highly disillusioned as to what my true problem actually was. At the time I knew I was an addict of street crank. For the past four years I did what our book calls-controlled drinking, because I couldn't afford a drunk driving as my business relied on my having a license.

At my first group I introduced myself as an addict, and the counselor present told me to introduce myself as an alcoholic and an addict. I got angry inside, and then played by the rules. I knew I was an addict but was not sure about alcoholic label. I grew up with my mom being a practicing alcoholic during my teen years and I didn't want to become like her. In the treatment house we went to two meetings a week, and I was in tears most of the time. Maybe that had something to do with going through divorce the past summer.

I left that treatment facility before my stay was completed. Pretty confused as to what my problem actually was, all I knew is that I needed help to get better. The next day I arrived at my first outside AA meeting and introduced myself as an addict/alcoholic. I wasn't sure I was an alcoholic at the time, but I damn sure I was an addict. I tried Narcotic Anonymous in the beginning but couldn't feel the spiritually there that I could feel in the rooms of Alcoholic Anonymous. In my confusion I just substituted the word alcohol for drugs when I read the book of Alcoholics Anonymous. It worked for me in the beginning

of my walk down this path. I was asked to share my story about four months in at a meeting and I was confused about how to do this without stepping on anyone's toes. My memory at the time was focused on my drug abuse more than it was on alcoholism. Being true to my innermost self was very difficult not knowing who I truly was, and well-intentioned people trying to tell me who I really was only seemed to add to the confusion. Being early in the program I just wanted a safe haven to come to and I didn't want to cause myself or anybody else any troubles. When I got sober there was a lot of what the book calls pure alcoholics. Alcohol was there one and only substance they used. That was not my story and I felt confused to where I actually belonged. During that time, I knew I actually felt better about myself while I was attending AA meetings.

As time continues to pass and the fog of my mind cleared, I began to see how alcohol played an important part in my downfall. Alcohol came first and being I was a blackout drinker from the start, I learned very quickly that pills and powder consumption would enhance and prolong the effect that the alcohol had on me. The first time I got drunk I jumped out of the back of a pickup traveling at about 45 MPH. Normal drinkers don't do that to themselves. I believed it took me about two years to come to conclusion that I was an alcoholic also and really believed it with my innermost being. I thank God for the understanding elders in the program at that time.

We have several closed meetings in our area and that is where our code (love and tolerance) goes out the window by people trying to protect our program as they understand it. This is where they stand behind one tradition discarding several others. I think it is pretty important that tradition one is the unity tradition. If we could focus on our unity first all the other traditions would build on the first. At one time the General Service Office had groups send in all their

perceived rules and found out that alcoholics would rule themselves out of recovery if they had their way. This tells me that I don't know what's good for me and I most surely don't know what's good for you. In this closed meeting I witnessed a bleeding deacon taking newcomers from the meeting going outside and telling them they were not welcome at the meeting. This is not the message I would want newcomers to the program to receive. Truly discarding old ideas is where I can grow in more understanding as I travel onward in my journey. Like all alcoholics on this journey I have to grow past all of my opposition to spiritual growth. I have myself experienced being a bleeding deacon and continue to experience it to some degree at different times in my sobriety. For me this is where true powerlessness comes into play. I am truly trying to what is right and screwing things up pretty badly operating on knowledge without some wisdom. It all goes back to "Love and Tolerance is our code." The more I can learn to tolerate the people that seem to go against my thinking and experience in the program and the more I can love them through my thinking and actions, the more serenity I have.

What we are really trying to pass on is our experience by doing the actions we have learned in the rooms of AA. We all have different experiences of how we arrived at taking the action and I place more value on my path because for the simple reason it is my path. I got to remember not everyone is following my path, so I have to learn to grow in my understanding as to the possibilities for people to grow on their path. I think if I place too much value on semantics, I have a tendency to miss the truth I am trying to convey the newcomer. This is where rule 62 applies to me. "Don't take myself so seriously." This applies to how I believe the program should be passed along. As long as we all arrive at the same destination, freedom from the alcoholic obsession we all have a chance to move into the spiritual realm if we so choose.

Balance—a word often misunderstood

INTRODUCTION: THIS AND THAT ABOUT CHAOS

MY DISEASE IS CENTERED IN MY MIND

HITTING BOTTOMS IN SOBRIETY

SEEKING BALANCE: INNER AND OUTER

THIS CHAOS IN AA: A ZOOM BOMBER BY ANY OTHER NAME

THAT CHAOS IN AA: NO ONE THINKING OF 12 TRADITIONS?

ADMIRATION FOR THE PIONEERS WHO STEPPED UP IN 2020

OUR CHILDREN SUPERVISE OUR SOCIAL DISTANCING

DIVISIVENESS IN HUMANITY

CONCLUSION: AND WHAT ABOUT EDDIE?

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INTRODUCTION: THIS AND THAT ABOUT CHAOS

In April, I was talking to Joey, our Newsletter Chair. I enjoy chatting with him. This particular time we ended up talking about the COVID-19 virus and the disruptions to the routines that are occurring inside and outside of AA.

I was sharing about how despite the uncomfortable experiences and internal resistance I had been experiencing about pressured changes to my daily routines, I was truly grateful for the resulting upsurge of benefit I was getting from my inventories and inner growth.

I was just coming out of another of those time periods when I was largely unaware that one more time, I had been sliding into that condition we might call “resting on my laurels,” or, one of my favorites, “making a run for the spiritual desert.”

He asked me if I would write an article for the Newsletter.

At that time I was distracted by an argument I was hearing; a committee debating the merits of his proposal, the committee being the one that lives in my head.

“Wow! It’s fantastic that he asked you. You can tell the story of these modern-day pioneers of AA, the people attending and facilitating the Zoom meetings. Someday you will be able to say you were there; when the Zoom meetings were the best option of the day for so many groups, do you remember, in 2020?”

And there was that other one, the voice of discontent. “That’s a bad idea! You’re too busy as it is. You can’t even get to bed on time!”

So, I let him have it. "Yes, I'd be happy to do that."

HITTING BOTTOMS IN SOBRIETY

MY DISEASE IS CENTERED IN MY MIND

My story of AA recovery, unity and service is one of discovering over and over again the beauty and richness of finding balance in my life between my inner experience and the actions I take on the outer; service to my recovery community and my family.

Reading this, you may be led to think that this is something that I have learned and put into action on a somewhat continuous basis. However, that is not the case.

My life's story, even before starting my regular drinking at age fifteen, is one of being out of balance; listening to my mind, not my heart. I believed that everything I was thinking was real, and... real important, and... if I was thinking it, I needed to persuade you all to line up with it!

Today, my mind and heart are unified in gratitude that Alcoholics Anonymous has been the doorway to finding freedom from alcohol, but they are not unified about finding freedom from my own negative thinking.

In my heart, I'm grateful to know this, but the mind is where my egotism lives; defiantly in opposition to relinquishing control of my life, cunning, baffling, powerful!

And where do I get the motivation to practice 12 Steps daily? Sad to say, it usually comes from another bout of suffering; that and the inspiration I derive by participating in the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

"As long as we placed self-reliance first, a genuine reliance upon a Higher Power was out of the question. That basic ingredient of all humility, a desire to seek and do God's will, was missing."

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 75

The cycle I'm talking about starts when I hit another bottom in sobriety: some ego deflation, then I employ the tools of the program to good effect. I find freedom from the selfish, dishonest, resentful and fearful thinking and I achieve some measure of effortless living; serenity, goodwill toward others, even moments of love in my heart.

Over time, my efforts with the 12 Steps, inventories in particular, seem to tail off. Sooner or later my life starts getting bumpy; then the crash, some person, place or thing not going my way, discontentment, depression, anxiety or even anger.

It seems that I have a layer of illusionary entitlement below the level of consciousness. Unless I'm diligent with my daily Step work, it can rise up and take over without me noticing.

The best way I can describe it is to paint a picture of myself; lounging on the couch; in love with *the idea* of surrendering my will to God, excited about being happy, joyous and free, without any further effort on my part, comfortable on the couch, and people will bring me food.

So, it is with a sense of humor that I write a little bit of this and that about chaos in Alcoholics Anonymous; and my curiosity, looking forward to finding out how much of the chaos that will show up in this article will be mostly in my 69-year-old brain. I'm enjoying a silent chuckle as I write.

The cycle I'm talking about starts when I hit a bottom in sobriety: some ego deflation, another bankruptcy stemming from my efforts to manage my own life. Then, I claw and scratch myself out of some dark hole, forced to do so by my suffering, to employ the tools of the program to good effect. I find increasing freedom from selfish, dishonest, resentful and fearful thinking; achieve some measure of serenity, goodwill toward others, even moments of love in my heart.

But this has not yet resulted in me reaching the “great turning point” that Bill Wilson wrote about in the 12&12; the chapter on Step Seven.

“We saw we needn’t always be bludgeoned and beaten into humility. It could come quite as much from our voluntary reaching for it as it could from unremitting suffering. A great turning point in our lives came when we sought for humility as something we really wanted, rather than as something we must have. It marked the time when we could commence to see the full implication of Step Seven: “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 75

This cycle has continued throughout my recovery; every time I rebound from another bottom in sobriety. I settle into an improved attitude and peace of mind. My efforts with the 12 Steps, inventories in particular, seem to gradually tail off. Sooner or later my life starts getting bumpy; perhaps unnoticed by myself until just before the crash; some person, place or thing not going my way, discontentment, depression, anxiety or even anger. For me, I find it useful to think of this cycle as my particular relapse pattern.

“We temporarily cease to grow because we feel satisfied that there is no need for all of A.A.’s Twelve Steps for us. We are doing fine on a few of them. Maybe we are doing fine on only two of them, the First Step and that part of the Twelfth where we “carry the message.” In A.A. slang, that blissful state is known as “two-stepping.” And it can go on for years.”

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 113

In my early sobriety I was taught by sponsors and the members of my home group that relapse does not start with the first drink; it starts with the first think, “stinking thinking,” they said. Drinking was the just final action of their relapses. The next day, when they continued to drink, they said, “I was no longer in relapse; just another alcoholic, feeding my alcoholism.”

“Learning daily to spot, admit, and correct these flaws is the essence of character-building and good living.”

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 95

SEEKING BALANCE: INNER AND OUTER

It seems that I have a layer of illusionary attachment below the level of consciousness; entitlement. Unless I’m diligent with my daily Step work, it can rise up and take over without me even noticing.

This is true no matter how much service I am doing. In fact, I have experience with the phenomena of my busyness with service actually deteriorating the quality, the usefulness to others, of my service; placing so much importance on it that I was no longer attending to my inner experience; my connection to a Higher Power, humility found wanting.

“Another great dividend we may expect from confiding our defects to another human being is humility—a word often misunderstood. To those who have made progress in A.A., it amounts to a clear recognition of what and who we really are, followed by a sincere attempt to become what we could be.”

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 58

It says there that it is humility that is the word often misunderstood; not balance. Well, that’s okay. I can’t think me way into either one of those states of being.

These past two years I have found much inspiration in Al-Anon. My experiences of balance and humility are still fleeting, yet I love my life. Improving my ability to exercise self-care also elevates my ability to be useful to others.

I value something that Bill Wilson wrote about the different purposes of our first and second Legacies; 12 Steps and 12 Traditions. It speaks to me about balance and humility, as well as the inner and the outer. He placed it in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*: the first page of the Forward.

“AA’s 12 Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole.”

“AA’s 12 Traditions apply to the life of the Fellowship itself. They outline the means by which AA maintains its unity and relates itself to the world about it, the way it lives and grows.”

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 15

The best way I can describe my relapse pattern is to paint a picture of myself; on the outside, working hard, in service to Alcoholics Anonymous, sponsees, District 4, Oregon Area, the Hospital Committee, my home group, other fellowships and my family. Simultaneously, I’m lounging on the couch on the inner; in love with the idea of surrendering my will to God, excited about being happy, joyous and free, without any further effort on my part, comfortable on the couch, and people will bring me food.

“If we ask, God will certainly forgive our derelictions. But in no case does He render us white as snow and keep us that way without our cooperation. That is something we are supposed to be willing to work toward ourselves. He asks only that we try as best we know how to make progress in the building of character.”

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 65

So, it is with a sense of humor that I write a little bit of this and that about chaos; within me, in Alcoholics Anonymous, in the world as people around the globe are dealing with this pandemic.

“Have we alcoholics in A.A. got, or can we get, the resources to meet these calamities which come to so many? These were problems of life which we could never face up to. Can we now, with the help of God as we understand Him, handle them as well and as bravely as our nonalcoholic friends often do? Can we transform these calamities into assets, sources of growth and comfort to ourselves and those about us? Well, we surely have a chance if we switch from “two-stepping” to “twelve-stepping,” if we are willing to receive that grace of God which can sustain and strengthen us in any catastrophe.”

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 113

I’m enjoying a silent chuckle as I write; looking forward to finding out how much of the chaos I’m going to describe here will be just in the mind of this 69-year-old baby-boomer.

THIS CHAOS IN AA: A ZOOM BOMBER BY ANY OTHER NAME

I called Samantha, an old friend. We both served at Oregon Area years ago. I knew she had helped her home group to set up their Zoom meeting, serving as a Zoom host.

She described those first meetings and the appearance of the cyber bombers; persons who joined the meeting for the purpose of disrupting it or making some kind of a political, or socio-political statement.

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pressures, it was traumatic when the bombers showed up in the meeting, screaming obscenities, some racist or sexist; loud, high-pitched electronic sounds, smoking a bong, masturbating on the video.

It seemed clear to her that she had to respond immediately; lock it down, shut down the chat function, convinced that if had they not done so the meeting would not be there the next day.

In preparation for the bombers returning, not only did they keep the chat option shut down, but they required everyone coming into the meeting to wait first for admittance in the waiting room. They found it to be a very useful decision because some of the cyber bombers were using alias names that were crafted to have vulgar or suggestive meaning, though not obviously so at first glance.

In the following days it was agreed that the chairperson would take control of the mute function; muting everyone as them came into the meeting, not allowing individuals to unmute themselves, unmuting them only when called on to share; locked out anyone from coming into the meeting 15 minutes after it started.

One of the measures they took turned out to be unnecessary and was quickly discontinued. That first meeting after the Zoom bombers showed up it was decided to admit people to the meeting only if they had a phone number that matched numbers on the group telephone list. However, they quickly recognized the bombers weren't using phones that were without video.

These measures were upsetting and some members were vocal in their opposition to the measures the Zoom hosts were taking. They couldn't greet others verbally when they started and ended their sharing; couldn't say the serenity prayer together or blurt out, "Happy Birthday," we love you!"

After two weeks of doing the service, she had to step down; attend to her stress level, practice the Steps, increase her self-care.

She asked for my feedback. I shared about some of my experience; perhaps aptly put under the heading, "I can't give away what I don't have." I have to take care of myself, or I will have nothing to give.

How important it was, when serving as your delegate, to make and remain faithful to my commitment to my dear one; one weekend a month available to my family, not to AA service. She had spoken up with courage and respect. In self-examination, I recognized the truth. I was out-of-balance, putting nearly all my energy and time into AA service; slighting my family.

Samantha and I discussed Concept X.

“Short Form, Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority, with the scope of such authority well defined.

“Our service structure cannot function effectively and harmoniously unless, at every level, each operational responsibility is matched by a corresponding authority to discharge it. This requires that authority must be delegated at every level—and that the responsibility and authority of every entity are well defined and clearly understood.”

Concept X: P-8, Twelve Concepts Illustrated
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When the Zoom meetings started up, there was little time for groups to develop a “well defined” group conscience to cover the emergence of the Zoom bombers, for example. Her agreement with the group’s GSR that she would serve as the Zoom host, gave her all the authority she needed to accomplish the job. This is Concept Ten in action, as well as Concept III.

“Let us always be sure that there is an abundance of final or ultimate authority to correct or to reorganize; but let us be equally sure that all of our trusted servants have a clearly defined and adequate authority to do their daily work and to discharge their clear responsibilities.”

Concept X: P-8, Twelve Concepts Illustrated
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“Concept III: ... You should be familiar with the Conference Charter and the Bylaws of the General Service Board as background for this Concept, both of which are found in The A.A. Service Manual. For, except for the specific directions in these documents, every trusted servant and every A.A. entity — at all levels of service — has the right “to decide . . . how they will interpret and apply their own authority and responsibility to each particular problem or situation as it arises.” That is, they can “decide which problems they will dispose of themselves and upon which matters they will report, consult, or ask specific directions.” This is “the essence of ‘The Right of Decision.’”

“But this right also means the Fellowship must have trust in its “trusted servants.” If the groups instruct their G.S.R.s rather than giving them a “Right of Decision,” then the area conference is hamstrung.”

Concept III: P-8, Twelve Concepts Illustrated
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THAT CHAOS IN AA: NO ONE THINKING OF 12 TRADITIONS?

My imagination was fired. When was the last time that AA needed to adapt to a changing world so abruptly? My curiosity was leading only down blind alleys. Here I was, this self-proclaimed AA history buff; stumped!

What about the chaos in AA before we had 12 Traditions? Where did I read the story of our founders locking up a wet drunk; trying to get him sober?

I got out my copy of the book, *Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers*. I scanned through it, unable to find anything like the story I was vaguely remembering.

I called Joey. “Joey, do you have a copy of *Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers*?” Yes, he did. He got back to me in a couple of days, “Page 80,” he said.

“Young Smitty, who noted that Bill and his father were “*determined* to make a convert out of somebody at that time,” recalled that our co-founders would lock Eddie up in a second-floor room of his house in an effort to keep him sober.

“One time, Eddie slid down the drain spout and was heading merrily up the street, Dad and Bill hot after him—Dad in his car and Bill running him down on foot,” Smitty said. “Just before Bill gave out, Eddie did, too, and Bill cornered him and took him back to the house.

Shortly after, Eddie lost his house, and he and his wife came to live with us.”

~Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers, p. 78-80

Now, that is some chaos! I wanted to know what time period this had happened. I went back to page 76; the beginning of the chapter titled, “A.A. number three arrives.” Oh, my goodness! Could that be the last time AA was changing so quickly? Of course they weren’t thinking about 12 Traditions! They were flying blind!

“So at the outset, how best to live and work together as groups became the prime question. In the world about us we saw personalities destroying whole peoples. The struggle for wealth, power, and prestige was tearing humanity apart as never before. If strong people were stale-mated in the search for peace and harmony, what was to become of our erratic band of alcoholics? As we had once struggled and prayed for individual recovery, just so earnestly did we commence to quest for the principles through which A.A. itself might survive. On anvils of experience, the structure of our Society was hammered out.”

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 131

There was only a fellowship of two. They had only this limited amount of experience. They couldn’t know what they didn’t know. They learned it by making mistakes; finding out what didn’t work and making a list of principles that corrected the mistakes, upon which the 12 Traditions would be codified.

“With the last drink under his belt and the idea of service in his heart, Dr. Bob was eager to join Bill in finding another drunk to ‘fix,’ as they put it in those days.”

~Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers, p. 76

ADMIRATION FOR THE PIONEERS WHO STEPPED UP IN 2020

I’m imagining years in the future, expressing my admiration for pioneers of a new era in AA.

Who would that be? Well, there’s the Area Officers who are setting up an assembly such that requires a complete redefinition of nearly everything, the GSR(s), the Zoom hosts, the sponsors, and what about all the members that are going to Zoom meetings, cut off from the in-person-meetings that have been so important to them, making the best of the rapidly changing landscape, these unpredictable times, everyone who is staying sober, carrying the message, all of you!

After talking with Samantha, I spoke with the GSR of my home group. In her role as GSR, she has had a central role in helping our group’s Zoom meeting get off the ground.

I asked about how she was doing in this new world of social distancing and Zoom. At first, our conversation seemed to focus on our emotional sobriety; our gratitude for the 12 Steps and the blessings we enjoy on a daily basis, as well as our challenges.

When we started talking about the Zoom meetings, she expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to reconnect with her roots; meetings and fellowships in Los Angeles, the freedom to attend meetings in far-away places.

She also serves with our Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters in District 28. She said that the cultural differences are such that they are not drawn to Zoom meetings. Additionally, it does not come easy to them to be careful about the COVID-19 virus; hand washing, social distancing, avoiding touching one’s eyes, nose and mouth.

She described recently attending a meeting of about half a dozen Spanish speakers who were gathered to discuss Zoom meetings.

There are no Spanish-speaking Zoom meetings in the Salem area, but she was able to connect them with one in Los Angeles. She saw light dawning in at least one person’s eyes; recognition of the possibilities, one alcoholic talking to another, in Spanish!

It was an experience that gave her hope and gratitude. It brought her back to her roots; memories of what she heard in meetings right at the beginning of her sobriety. “We carry the message in our home group, not knowing if those newcomers will stick, but we ourselves stay sober.”

I called Ricardo. He is the DCM for District 4. He shared with me his experience, strength and hope connected to using Zoom to chair the District 4 meeting for the first time.

Ricardo and I each took a turn creating a Zoom meeting and sending an invite to each other, just for practice. We worked out a generic paragraph that could be included in a Zoom meeting format by a district or an AA group.

We were just plain having fun; doing no harm, laughing and enjoying sobriety.

I went to the Oregon Area Website. The first thing I came to was a message about COVID-19. “The Covid-19 pandemic is impacting our fellowship in a way never experienced before. We’ve created a [resource page](#) with resources for members and groups impacted.”

Well, that made it easy for a guy who doesn’t know his way around a computer! There was lots of good information, including how to get free access to 2020 Grapevine articles.

I got in touch with Mark, the Oregon Area Assistant Webmaster; asked him about Zoom. He explained that he was putting on trainings for AA members.

I called Ricardo again; asked him if he would like to go to a Zoom training about Zoom. He wanted to attend; called a few people, and in what seemed like overnight, we were scheduled.

The training was May 30th. Mark was so patient with us; easy to listen to as well. Steve and Ralph, trusted servants of the T.T.C.O. speaker meeting in Salem, were in attendance., On the occasion of their last meeting there was difficulty when an unknown number of people who were unable to get into the Zoom meeting, including both the AA and Al-Anon speakers. Mark was able to point the way to the solution.

This is the kind of support that was not available to Bill and Bob when they were locking Eddie up in his home. The benefit of our 7th Tradition dollars are multiplied many times over by the volunteer efforts of so many trusted servants!

OUR CHILDREN SUPERVISE OUR SOCIAL DISTANCING

When our daughters were ten and seven and I was newly sober, I looked them in the eye one day and said in an exaggerated serious tone, “When your mother and I tell you to do something, it is very important that you do it, because... we are training you to be our parents when we get old.”

The 10-year-old broke out in near-hysterical laughter. Her younger sister did not understand what I had said, but upon seeing how much her sister who she adored was laughing, she too joined in.

The story has been told and retold many times over the years, but never has it sparked as much laughter as it did that first time.

However, the story has now become somewhat a reality. All of our family members are here in Salem; four households within 10 minutes of our home.

When our daughters were 16 and 13. I made my amends to them as best I knew how. It seemed hopeless; how could I possibly make amends for having been absent from the home, trading time with them for being with my drinking buddies in a tavern?

But I set out to make living amends; stay sober, grow spiritually, be the best dad I could be. Whenever I stumble, I have the Steps. My service on the outer suffers when it is not in balance with the inner.

Both our daughters work in medical settings and have been under a great deal of stress as a result of this pandemic. It was very difficult for me to understand the importance of canceling in mid-March my plans to travel to Redmond, Oregon and stay for three nights with my 90-year-old mother and her partner.

But I listened to my family, and even though I was not graceful about it, canceled the trip. Only after doing so did I remember that my great-grandmother was orphaned in the 1880's when her mother and grandmother died from the flu within six weeks of each other.

DIVISIVENESS IN HUMANITY

For more than the last decade, evidence of a rising polarization in our country has been showing itself; conflicts of class conflict and concentration of wealth, racism, gender identification conflicts, sexual preference, issues of white male entitlement.

Tradition Ten

“Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”

“Never since it began has Alcoholics Anonymous been divided by a major controversial issue. Nor has our Fellowship ever publicly taken sides on any question in an embattled world. This, however, has been no earned virtue. It could almost be said that we were born with it, for, as one oldtimer recently declared, “Practically never have I heard a heated religious, political, or reform argument among A.A. members. So long as we don't argue these matters privately, it's a cinch we never shall publicly.”

In my neighborhood there were persons on both sides of the divide as to whether or not they should be following the directives of the Governor of Oregon; the stay at home order.

My wife and I we have come to agreement to align with our daughters requests that we continue in the most careful practices, even as the restrictions are being relaxed in Salem; sequencing and social distancing.

We consult with one or both of them before we consider leaving our home for any reason other than those that we have already agreed upon. Tradition Ten has a bearing on this topic; supports me in these decisions we have made for our family.

“Let us reemphasize that this reluctance to fight one another or anybody else is not counted as some special virtue which makes us feel superior to other people. Nor does it mean that the members of Alcoholics Anonymous, now restored as citizens of the world, are going to back away from their individual responsibilities to act as they see the right upon issues of our time. But when it comes to A.A. as a whole, that's quite a different matter. In this respect, we do not enter into public controversy, because we know that our Society will perish if it does. We conceive the survival and spread of Alcoholics Anonymous to be something of far greater importance than the weight we could collectively throw back of any other cause. Since recovery from alcoholism is life itself to us, it is imperative that we preserve in full strength our means of survival.”

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 177

CONCLUSION: AND WHAT ABOUT EDDIE?

Before winding this up, let's get back to the story of Eddie. What more can we learn about connecting the dots between that chaos back then and this shifting landscape in 2020.

“The favorite story about Eddie—one Anne loved to tell—had to do with the time he chased her with a butcher knife. Elgie and John R. (who joined AA in April 1939) recalled hearing Anne’s account of that interrupted lunch (tunafish sandwiches and coffee at the Smiths’). “Out of a clear blue sky, Eddie jumped up, grabbed a butcher knife, and chased Anne upstairs.” In Anne’s words, as Elgie remembered them:

“I didn’t know what to do, so I got down on my knees and started praying. Eddie was gibbering about what he was going to do with that knife, and I just prayed and prayed. I started with the Lord’s Prayer, then I kept thinking of different verses. I kept my voice low, in a monotone. I figured sooner or later it was going to bore him. Finally, he started to calm down,

and Bill came up and got the knife. To this day we can't figure out what happened, except Bob says he must have been allergic to tunafish.

"After that, they thought maybe Eddie wasn't the right one to work on," said Elgie. "But years later we went to Youngstown in the car, out to the country club where they were holding a big AA meeting, and the first thing Doc said was 'Holy Moses!' There was Eddie."

~Dr. Bob and the Good Old Timers, p. 80-81

So the early AA(s) sent us time capsules, these stories of chaos, heartbreak bottoms, inspiration and sobriety; Bill and Lois, Bob, Anne, and Smitty, and all the early pioneers, so much of our literature, the 12 Steps, Traditions and Concepts. I know Bill was a visionary, but I can't imagine he envisioned Zoom bombers, or even Zoom meetings.

While writing, I remembered Bill's words, "sometimes the good is the enemy of the best," found in the 12 & 12. I can become attached to the improvements that have come into my life in such away that they become impediments to my continuing spiritual growth.

I have naturally become attached to AA being a certain way, but it has been very good for me to move to a different town, a different home group after 28 years as a member of Eastside Sunrise in SE Portland.

"Challengingly, my friends looked at me as their spokesman continued. 'Bill, haven't you often said right here in this meeting that sometimes the good is the enemy of the best?

~Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Tradition Two, p. 138

I am so grateful to Joey for his invitation to make this offering of a Newsletter article.

In the midst of writing it, I remembered the circle and triangle. In weddings all across this continent, rings are exchanged wedding vows; the circle symbolizing "forever," "unending." To scientists and mathatetians, the triangle is "delta," "change."

I want to let go of my attachments to keeping AA the way it was when I was new. Any time I catch myself holding an attitude that my new home group should be more like the home group where I got sober, I want to let go of that attachment as well.

It would seem that I have a rigid and deeply held resistance to anything named, "computer," unless it is something that doesn't involve checking my email every day and I already know how to do it.

Still, in this current climate, I have been applying myself to make use of Zoom, and in other ways I'm learning new skills; seeing myself become gradually more flexible, fitting myself to the changes that are occurring around me.

“And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone—even alcohol.”

~Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 84

It helps me to do so when I remember the symbols that were chosen to represent our movement; circle, triangle, unending change, change unending.

Alcoholics Anonymous is always changing; rising to the occasion for each new generation of newcomers. I intend to fit myself to the Zoom meetings as long as they are needed.

I need not fear for the future of AA because the principles will never let me down, if I continue to practice them.

Just for today, will I accept this chaos in the world around me; testing me, these unexpected twist and turns? Or, will I try to hang on to any past progress or illusion of satisfaction I found in earlier times; fighting for the “good old days,” letting the good becoming the enemy of the best?

Just for today... circle and triangle, change unending.

Thank you, Alcoholics Anonymous, for being the doorway to this new life.

In love and service, Eric K