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The Fundamentals -- In Retrospect

By
Dr. Bob

From Akron, Ohio

THE feeling that one belongs to and has a definite personal part in the work of a growing and spiritually prospering organization for the release of the alcoholics of mankind from a deadly enslavement is always gratifying. For me, there is double gratification in the realization that more than 13 years ago, an All-wise Providence, whose ways must always be mysterious to our limited understandings, brought me to "see my duty clear" and to contribute in a decent humility, as have so many others, my part in guiding the first trembling steps of the then infant organization, Alcoholics Anonymous.

It is fitting at this time to indulge

in some retrospect regarding certain fundamentals. Much has been written, much has been said about the 12 Steps of A.A. These tenets of our faith and practice were not worked out overnight and then presented to our members as an opportunist creed. Born of our early trials and many tribulations, they were and are the result of humble and sincere desire, sought in personal prayer for Divine guidance.

As finally expressed and offered, they are simple in language, plain in meaning. They are also workable by any person having a sincere desire to obtain and keep sobriety. The results are the proof. Their simplicity and workability are such that no special interpretations, and certainly no reservations, have ever

been necessary. And it has become increasingly clear that the degree of harmonious living which we achieve is in direct ratio to our earnest attempt to follow them literally under Divine guidance to the best of our ability.

YET, withal, there are no "shibboleths" in A.A. We are not bound by the thongs of theological doctrine. None of us may be excommunicated and cast into outer darkness. For we are many minds in our organization and an A.A. decalogue in the language of "Thou shall not" would gall us indeed.

Look at our 12 Points of A.A. Tradition. No random expressions these, based on just casual observation. On the contrary, they represent the sum of our experience as individuals, as groups within A.A. and similarly with our fellows and other organizations in the great fellowship of humanity under God throughout the world. They are entirely suggestive, yet the spirit in which they have been conceived merits their serious, prayerful consideration as the guidepost of A.A. policy for the individual, the group and our various committees, local and national.

We have found it wise policy, too, to hold to no glorification of the individual. Obviously, that is sound. Most of us will concede that when it came to the personal showdown of admitting our failures and deciding to surrender our will and our lives to Almighty God, as *we un-*

derstood Him, we still had some sneaking ideas of personal justification and excuse. We had to discard them but the ego of the alcoholic dies a hard death. Many of us because of activity have received praise not only from our fellow A.A.s but from the world at large. We would be ungrateful indeed to be boorish when that happens yet it is so easy for us to become, privately perhaps, just a little vain about it all. Yet, fitting and wearing halos is not for us.

WE'VE all seen the new member who stays sober for a time, largely through sponsor-worship. Then maybe the sponsor gets drunk and you know what usually happens. Left without a human prop, the new member gets drunk too. He has been glorifying an individual instead of following the Program.

Certainly we need leaders but we must regard them as the human agents of the Higher Power and not with undue adulation as individuals. The 4th and 10th Steps can not be too strongly emphasized here—*"Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves . . . continue to make personal inventory . . . promptly admit it when we are wrong."* There is your perfect antidote for halo-poisoning.

So with the question of Anonymity. If we have a banner, that word, speaking of the surrender of the individual—the ego—is emblazoned on it. Let us dwell thoughtfully on its full meaning and learn

thereby to remain humble, modest, ever-conscious that we are eternally under Divine direction.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS was nurtured in its early days around a kitchen table. Many of our pioneer groups, some of our most resultful meetings and best programs have had their origin around that modest piece of furniture with the coffee pot handy on the stove.

True, we have progressed materially to better furniture and more comfortable surroundings, yet the kitchen table must ever be appropriate for us. It is the perfect symbol of simplicity. In A.A. we have no V.I.P.'s nor have we need of any. Our organization needs no title-holders nor grandiose buildings. That is by design. Experience has taught us that simplicity is basic in preservation of our personal sobriety and helping those in need.

Far better it is for us to fully understand the meaning and practice of "Thou good and faithful servant" than to listen to "With 60,000 members you should have a 60 stories high administration headquarters in New York with an assortment of trained 'ists' to direct your affairs." We need nothing of the sort. God grant that A.A. may ever stay simple.

Over the years we have tested and developed suitable techniques for our purpose. They are entirely flexible. We have all known and seen miracles—the healing of broken in-

dividuals, the rebuilding of broken homes. And always, it has been the constructive personal 12th Step work based on an ever upward-looking faith which has done the job.

IN as large an organization as ours, we naturally have had our share of those who fail to measure up to certain obvious standards of conduct. They have included schemers for personal gain, petty swindlers and confidence men, crooks of various kinds and other human fallibles. Relatively their number has been small, much smaller than in many religious and social uplift organizations. Yet they have been a problem and not an easy one. They have caused many an A.A. to stop thinking and working constructively for a time.

We cannot condone their actions, yet we must concede that when we have used normal caution and precaution in dealing with such cases, we may safely leave them to that Higher Power. Let me reiterate that we A.A.'s are many men and women, that we are of many minds. It will be well for us to concentrate on the goal of personal sobriety and active work. We humans and alcoholics on strict moral stock-taking must confess to at least a slight degree of larcenous instinct. We can hardly arrogate the roles of judges and executioners.

Thirteen grand years! To have been a part of it all from the beginning has been reward indeed.