

*Recovery*

*in A. A.*

*Without God*

# Recovery in A.A. Without God

## Welcome

We are glad you've come to an AA meeting. AA is made of people like you--people with a desire to stop drinking. That's the only requirement.

This means that even if you get alarmed by the talk of God, you belong here. No one can kick you out. AA belongs to you as much as to the believers.

And there are plenty of sober atheists in AA. There are even some atheists who use the word "God," but they define it as "Good Orderly Direction" or "Group Of Drunks" or "Love." So take what you hear with a grain of salt. If some power other than "God" can keep us sober for many decades, it can work for you.

This pamphlet addresses specific issues that atheists might face in AA.

## Alienation

It's astonishing how many alcoholics feel like outsiders. In their families, at work, and at AA meetings, this is a very common theme. These feelings do *not* mean you should leave. Leaving puts you trying to stay sober alone, which is too hard. The fellowship exists because staying sober alone was too hard for the founders and continues to be too hard for the members.

As much as you need AA, AA needs you. Without you, we become less welcoming, less diverse, less robust. But more important, if you leave because you feel alienated, we have failed in our primary purpose: "to help the alcoholic who still suffers."

Here are some options when you feel alienated:

- Find people you are comfortable with. It only takes a few.
- Debrief with someone who understands.
- Ask for what you need: "Would you tell me your thoughts and their reasons instead of telling me what to think?" "Let's close the meeting with the Responsibility Statement rather than The Lord's Prayer."
- You can always quote Bill W. to someone who isn't getting it:  
*"...let us not pressure anyone with individual or even collective views... Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of AA, so long as he or she so declares."*
- Look for similarities with those who conceptualize things in different terms than you use.
- Translate what others say into your own terms. What quality, force, or principle is this person referring to when they say "God"? Does it translate as "wisdom"? "friend"? "human goodness"? What does the Big Book mean when it says, "To the Wives"? or "power greater than ourselves"? Does the speaker's share become more useful to you if you substitute "human goodness" for "Lord"?
- Look for the truth in what the speaker is saying. For example, if a person says, "It's more blessed to give than to receive," some folks might bristle at what sounds like a religious text. But you could also consider whether or not giving confers benefits on the giver.

## **How to find a sponsor**

If you are new, finding a sponsor might be the most helpful thing you can do. He can help you stay sober long enough to get your feet under you. You can ask someone to sponsor you temporarily, and you can change sponsors if the first one doesn't work out. You're driving the recovery bus.

A sponsor helps you work the steps. She might also listen to what's on your mind, make suggestions when you want them, and share her own experience strength and hope. But those things are up to the two of you to negotiate.

Who have you met that you want guiding you? Who has the kind of life you want? It is not necessary for a sponsor to share your beliefs, but he must respect them. Look for someone who can work with your way of thinking and not insist on his.

## **How to find a Higher Power that works for you**

A.A. uses God to emphasize the fact that an alcoholic cannot get sober on self-discipline. We don't control our recovery, but surrender to it. For atheists, finding another name for the power that keeps us sober can be very helpful.

Note that the word used is "power," not "being." The sailor relies on wind to power the boat, recognizing that the greater power of the wind will take her where rowing cannot. Trying to control one's drinking is like rowing.

The sailor understands the wind, but does the hawk rising on a column of warm air understand thermals? It is not essential to understand a power in order to use it. In fact, using it might be the first step to understanding.

Some examples of larger forces, or higher powers, used by sober atheists include:

"The force that keeps me sober"

"The force that keeps my sponsor sober"

"Honesty"

"Love"

"My future self"

"The fellowship of AA"

"The principles of AA"

"Doing the steps"

"Love of life"

"Grace"

"Big mama"

"John"

"Great spirit"

"The universe"

"My highest light"

"My support system"

What force has brought you this far? What fuels your desire to stop drinking? What can protect you from forgetting the importance of sobriety?

If these questions don't help, try listing the qualities you want in your new life. Do you want peace? honesty? self-respect? Such a list can help you articulate what matters to you, and this can then guide you. Or you might adopt a shorthand name for the whole collection, perhaps "what's best for all" or "integrity." If you adopt integrity as your guide, other people

will help you because they also want you to have integrity. This is the power in being guided by what you value most.

## **Prayer**

The purpose of prayer is to keep one's commitment to change fresh in mind. Alcoholics are prone to amnesia about our alcoholism, especially in the early days of recovery. The idea of a drink comes to mind and the myriad of reasons to decline simply don't come to mind. If you start each day with a prayer to stay sober through the day, you are more likely to remember the reasons it matters to you.

Those who think of their higher power as a being have no trouble using prayer. But those who think of it as a non-human force can find this suggestion problematic.

For us, it can be helpful to remember that the intelligence we're addressing is our own. The subconscious mind can steer us toward or away from a drink, and we need some way to talk to that internal decider. As with any other habit, the mental habit of deciding to obtain alcohol doesn't disappear with the decision to stop. It needs as much persistence as going to the gym or cooking without butter. Any way of building rapport with the subconscious will help, always remembering to engage the "higher" self that wants a better life than the indulgent self provided.

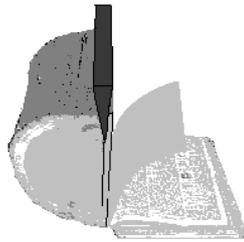
## **Working the steps**

The steps are a program of recovery. Deciding to stop is not enough to stop us; we need to be pro-active. Step work is a great way to spend the time when you would have been drinking, and it transforms our lives into stable, rewarding processes that require no running to the bottle.

Doing the steps in order makes the tasks manageable: admitting our powerlessness sets us up to look for a power that can help; trusting in such a power puts us in position to commit; the commitment then raises the question how to proceed, with the inventory answering that question. On it goes, the work broken down for us into bite size pieces. (Ok, meal-size pieces.)

If you've settled on a higher power and have a sponsor, you're in good position to work through the steps. If you don't have a higher power or a sponsor, you can still get to work. Just remember that, if you get stuck, you can get help from other alcoholics. We're pulling for you!

I am responsible...  
When anyone, anywhere, reaches out  
for help, I want the hand of A.A.  
always to be there.  
And for that: I am responsible.



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