

**SUMMARY**  
**FOR THE**  
**WHITE PAPER ON THE MATTER OF A.A. ATHEIST/AGNOSTIC GROUPS**  
**AND RELATED CONCERNS**

**This paper has been prepared to remind us all that the guiding forces ensuring the future of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous are “Unity” and “One Ultimate Authority-A Loving God as He may express Himself” in the collective conscience of our society.**

**This statement is clearly verified by the books “Alcoholics Anonymous”, The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and “the A.A. Service Manual with the Twelve Concepts for World Service”. Since these are the basic texts which set forth the principles not only for individual A.A. members, but for A.A. as a whole, we must view with great alarm the ongoing deviations from these principles which are occurring within our Fellowship on a regular basis.**

**The purpose of this paper is to set forth in detail the specific nature of these dangerous deviations and to encourage a course of action for eliminating them and returning our Fellowship to the pure spiritual oasis that has nourished suffering alcoholics for 75 years. We would all be remiss in our responsibilities if we fail at this crucial juncture.**

**When we look to the “I Am Responsible” statement, we must realize that its essence concerns the passing on of the same spiritual message that was miraculously created in 1935. There is absolutely nothing obsolete about any of our literature. When followed as directed, their spiritual power continues to work miracles on a regular basis.**

**The course of action recommended by this paper is to once again return the spiritual control and direction of A.A. to the ages-old concept of the “inverted triangle”. The Service Manual clearly states that the spiritual course for A.A. originates with the individual A.A. member. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, the individual member is able to receive guidance from their Higher Power and intuitively know how to handle new situations.**

**This guidance is then collected at the Group level in the Group Conscience. The collective consciences of all the Groups should establish the basis for guidance at the District, Area, and General Service Conference level. The Service Manual makes it perfectly clear that this reliance on “One Ultimate Authority” also applies to the General Service Board and to our three corporations: A.A. World Services, Inc.; the General Service Office; and the Grapevine.**

**It is time that individual A.A. members through their groups assert their “Right” to criticize” (Concept II p.10) in an effort to change in the policies of the service structure through their “Trusted Servant” representatives (District, Area, and Delegates/Trustees). It is also time for our “Trusted Servants” to listen to the collective conscience of A.A. and carry out their aspirations instead of continuing to decide “what is best for us”. We know perfectly well what is best for us and we want to be heard!**

**It is time for the pamphlets, the videos, the Grapevine articles, the speeches of Trustees, and overall attitude of our Central Office to acknowledge the authority of the One who responded to the cries of our co-founder, Bill W., and guided us to the most precious spiritual society on this planet. The role of this “Authority” should continuously be referred to instead of slowly eliminating any mention of Him in our publications and speeches. Without this incredible “Power”, none of us would have experienced a spiritual awakening and sensed the presence of our Creator.**

**One of the policies being advanced by the General Service Office and some of our Trustees regarding expanding our membership is extremely disconcerting. In a not too subtle way, the idea is being advanced that we could make our Fellowship more “inclusive” if we put “God” in the background and let outsiders think that spirituality in A.A. was “optional”. This would enable so-called “non-believers” to enter A.A. with the assurance that they could easily keep their current beliefs. I would rather hear about serving beer at meetings than diminishing God’s central role.**

**The ultimate tragedy for Alcoholics Anonymous would be a future where new members were guided by various techniques to “water-wagon sobriety” and nothing more. In this A.A. “Purgatory”, no one would realize what they were missing and the stories of “spiritual transformations” from the A.A. past would be slowly discredited until it was officially determined that what happened to Bill W. on his bed at Town’s hospital was nothing more than an hallucination during alcoholic withdrawal.**

**In order to target us on a specific goal which encompasses all of the changes we seek, let us focus on one target- to insist that the theme of the International Conference in Atlanta, GA in 2015 be the following: “ONE ULTIMATE AUTHORITY –a loving God...”**

**I urge every A.A. member who gains access to this paper to read it very thoughtfully and try to absorb and understand each point that is made. As a result, you will be a well-informed member and one that is armed for demanding change.**

**“The reunion with one’s own Creator is truly life’s highest experience. To deliberately deprive a person of this experience by offering him a lesser experience, could be classified a crime.”      Anonymous**

**It is in this spirit, the following 2010 white paper is offered for consideration.**

**WHITE PAPER ON THE MATTER OF A.A ATHEIST/AGNOSTIC GROUPS  
AND RELATED CONCERNS**

**INTRODUCTION:** This paper is being prepared because this author believes A.A. has made an honest error in judgment by supporting the existence of atheist and agnostic A.A. Groups. This author also believes that this policy conveys a tacit approval of the underlying beliefs behind these A.A. Groups. Unfortunately, this is but one symptom of a deeper and more pervasive problem within our fellowship: namely, the constant watering down of the central role which God was intended to play in our Fellowship. After all, the ultimate authority for us is a loving God as He may express Himself in our Group conscience. This author travels extensively in A.A. this paper represents the views

Furthermore, for this and other reasons, there appears to be the beginning of a trend at some meetings to encourage discussion of components of sobriety, such as unselfishness, forgiveness, understanding, love, patience, etc. without any reference to God. It would seem to a listener that these qualities could easily be achieved by members on their own. There is a very faint sign that intolerance towards God is growing; even openly demonstrated at meetings by verbal objection towards one sharing about the importance of God in their personal recovery. I am reminded of the old definition of Ego: Easing God Out!

All of us know that A.A. cannot be hurt by anything occurring outside of the Fellowship. Our only danger will always lie within. Since the very survival of the A.A. vessel is dependent on our collective relationship with a loving God as He expresses Himself to us, a critical leak such as this must be repaired and sealed as soon as possible. Should this small crack in the A.A. dam widen, we may wish we had acted sooner.

**AUTHOR:** This author has been a member of our Fellowship for over 40 years. I have been extremely active since the very beginning. A.A. is the joy of my life and I want to do my part in preserving it as it was given to me. I choose to remain anonymous so that this paper will be judged solely on its merits. I also chose this approach because I realize the paper steps on a number of toes, and I don’t want my phone ringing off the hook!

**A.A., of course, has always welcomed people with many different ideas about the existence of God. This, of course, includes the religious, atheists, and agnostics. Most of us at one time, fit into one or more of those categories. We continue to welcome and love everyone. However, the A.A. spiritual journey comes into being through the abandoning of many old ideas in order to experience a new understanding of God. This understanding comes from the “experiencing” of God. In religion we were taught about God, in A.A. we are shown how to achieve contact with a God.**

**Our literature makes it perfectly clear that this is A.A.’s only way to truly overcome the disease of alcoholism. I have enclosed (Encl. #1) all of the quotes from our literature concerning A.A.’s guidance for newcomers who are agnostic/atheists—or simply angry at the idea of God---most of us! From these quotes we see that the A.A. approach for atheists/agnostics is to urge them to keep an open mind and to slowly move away from their old ideas and towards a God of their understanding. Nowhere does our literature suggest that A.A. or its members could assist newcomers to find a way to get sober without God.**

**We were blessed to be led away from our old ideas concerning “the God thing” and gently guided towards a spiritual awakening and the joy of seeing the world with God at the center. I will be eternally grateful that it was made quite clear to me that my old ideas would never get me both sober and happy. I was left with no choice but to have an open mind on the God issue.**

**ATHEISTS/AGNOSTICS: However, some of our members have chosen to keep their old ideas about the existence of God, or have later become atheists or agnostics. This is not new in A.A. and, in general, causes no problem for A.A. or A.A. members. Since it is customary for each A.A. member when sharing to generally keep his or her personal views about the particular nature of their God to themselves, atheists were courteous enough to not expound on Atheism during a meeting; much as someone would refrain from excessive talk of Jesus during their share.**

**As time passed, however, certain atheists/agnostics decided that their beliefs were entitled to be expressed openly. No longer should it be the practice to sit quietly and listen to what they perceive as but one side of the sobriety story---the God side. They felt it was only fair that the existence within A.A. of “Sobriety without God” should be given exposure. They began to seek a greater presence of Atheist/Agnostic materials in our publications.**

**Some report that when they would discuss their atheism at an A.A. meeting, other members would, as to be expected, point out that A.A. recommends the seeking of a power greater than themselves, or suggest that discussion of a particular personal belief system about God was not appropriate. These occurrences, in some cases, caused the atheist/agnostic members to feel out of place. In order to feel comfortable to talk freely**

about their philosophy with others who felt the same way, they started atheist/agnostic groups, which they felt was appropriate for them to do.

The decision by A.A. to sanction, not object to, the formation of such groups calling themselves A.A. was never seriously discussed or debated. It was simply accepted as a matter of courtesy or because grounds for not accommodating them were never examined. The Fellowship has a hard time saying no to anyone. The increasing influence within A.A. of the philosophy of “Sobriety without God”, or its second cousin, “Sobriety without mentioning God” has become a very troubling presence. We now find its presence in our pamphlets, the Grapevine, and at the General Service Conference itself!

### **CURRENT STATUS OF ATHEIST/AGNOSTIC GROUPS**

With a modest amount of research, I was able to prepare some enclosures listing most of the current groups and some of the changes that have been made to the steps. In Encl. #2, we find a state-by-state breakdown of Atheist/Agnostic groups in the U.S. as well as a list of Atheist Groups by name and location. At present, there appears to be about 70 groups in the U.S. Most chose names such as “free thinkers” Humanists, or Agnostic/Atheist. However, one group in Berkeley, CA saw fit to call itself “Godless Heathens”. This enclosure also contains the Agnostic Preamble and the Agnostic Twelve Steps which remove the word “God” and “prayer” wherever they appear. It also contains a list of Agnostic A.A. meetings in New York City. [www.agnosticAnyc.org](http://www.agnosticAnyc.org)

Encl. #3 presents the rationale for and purpose of the Atheist/Agnostic groups in the Chicago area. These groups are part of an entity known as “Quad-A. Quad-A “acknowledges recovering persons may have a valid and fulfilling sobriety with or without belief in a Higher Power as traditionally understood.” “For many regular Quad-A meeting-goers, the “Power greater than ourselves” and “God as we understood Him” are interpreted by the individual or “ignored altogether”. Quad-A is seen as appropriate for those who are new to A.A.

Encl. #4 Minneapolis Atheist/Agnostic meeting. [www.aaMinneapolis.org](http://www.aaMinneapolis.org)- click “meetings” enter “agnostic” in “search” box.

**PLEASE CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:**

### **THE GENERAL SERVICE BOARD APPEARS TO HAVE OVERLOOKED ITS OWN BYLAWS**

Page S109 of the A.A. Service Manual gives the following directive to the General Service Board: “However, because these Twelve Steps have proven to constitute an effective spiritual basis for life which, if followed, arrests the disease of alcoholism, the General

Service Board asserts the negative right of preventing, so far as it may be within its power so to do, any modification, alteration, or extension of these twelve steps.” (Emphasis added)

A close look at enclosure #2 (agnostic groups in N.Y. City) and #3 (QUAD A in Chicago) reveals that the steps have been altered to remove the words “God” and “prayer”, or that new alcoholics are told that the “Power greater than ourselves” and “God as we understood Him” can be interpreted by the individual or ignored altogether. (Emphasis added)

Specifically, the steps have been changed to read as follows: Step 3. “Made a decision to entrust our will and our lives to the care of the collective wisdom and resources of those who have searched before us.” Step 6. “Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character.” Step 7. “With humility and openness sought to eliminate our shortcomings.”, and in Chicago: a link is provided to help atheists find the atheist/agnostic meetings in N.Y. City. This link is called a link to “non-religious” A.A. groups in New York City. I surmise that this means that all the other A.A. groups in N.Y. City are considered religious! (Emphasis added)

I have never been to a “religious” A.A. meeting in 46 years. Mentioning the word “God” on a regular basis does not make A.A. religious. We all already know that. Some seem to be attempting to fabricate the idea that there is a religious problem within A.A. To assist in understanding the non-religious nature of A.A., please refer to the section entitled, “AA AND GOD”.

#### PAMPHLETS:

In spite of the fact that all our pamphlets are submitted to the proper committees for close study and then to the Conference for final approval, there continues to be a gradual elimination of the mention of the word “God” and His central role in the recovery of alcoholics. At the same time, however, authors give careful consideration to frequent mention of atheist/agnostic members or potential members.

For example, I suggest to the people I sponsor that they don’t even read the pamphlet on Sponsorship. Instead, I show them how to be a good sponsor. For me, the top priority of a sponsor is to guide the newcomer through the twelve steps so they will experience a spiritual awakening and feel the presence of God. On the other hand, the pamphlet, itself, is much more concerned with accommodating the various beliefs of new-comers to make sure that their feelings are not hurt.

The pamphlet “Do you think you’re different?” seems to treat atheism as if it were a permanent condition like race, age or sexual preference, when in fact it is a deliberate choice.

In “44 Questions”, we find a clear statement on p. 15 that the sharing of “experience, strength and hope” is the key element to living without alcohol.—no mention is made that reliance on a God of their understanding is really the key... later on p. 27 is the statement that “\*Acceptance of the Twelve Steps is not mandatory in any sense” We all know that the 12 steps are the only way to recover from our disease. They are “suggested” if you want to stay alive! Many of the pamphlets don’t even contain the 12 steps and 12 traditions—boiler-plate language for all A.A. printed material.

\*This sentence alone would seem to contradict the above mentioned General Service Board Bylaws.

**PREAMBLE:** In much of our written material, there seems to great reliance on and importance given to the words in our preamble which state that we are “a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.” The preamble was put together by the Editor of the Grapevine in 1947. At that time, the Grapevine began circulating to non-alcoholics and it was intended to tell them what A.A. was and what it was not. In essence, it was a public relations piece and is still used as one.

However, the preamble is not a summary of the spiritual path to recovery, but rather of the traditions. We must rely on the Big Book and the 12x12 to see how alcoholics get sober. We may indeed share our experience, strength and hope with each other, but the experience is about how we found “God” and how this “Higher Power” enabled us to get and stay sober. The words in the preamble were never intended to show an alcoholic the path to sobriety. We should stop using it as a means of explaining our spirituality to readers of our publications.

**GRAPEVINE:** In my early sobriety, the Grapevine was a very helpful addition to my sobriety. In addition to essays by Bill W., there would be many in depth discussions by older A.A. members of spiritual topics such as “surrender”, “humility”, or “forgiveness”. I would eagerly look in each issue for something submitted by Paul M. of Riverside, IL. Invariably, his articles would clear up something I was puzzling over.

On his 60<sup>th</sup> year of sobriety, I called him and thanked him for the help he had given me. He was kind enough to send me copies of everything he had written. I asked him if he had submitted anything recently. He, somewhat irritated, informed me that the Grapevine rejected his articles because they were “too spiritual”! He had a lot to say about the direction our magazine had taken. In fairness however, I must acknowledge that the magazine did run one last article before his death a couple of years ago.

I had noticed this trend in the Grapevine some years earlier and stopped reading it for the very same reason. Everything in the magazine seemed to carefully avoid putting too much emphasis on God. Instead, it seemed to concern itself with the nebulous virtue of diversity.

I suggest to the people I sponsor that they read other material, such “A New Pair of Glasses” or “As Bill Sees It”.

In his wonderful history books on A.A. (“Not God” and “A.A the Story”), Ernest Kurtz makes the same observation. On page 187 of “A.A. The Story”, he relates the fears that Bill W. had about the magazine. Kurtz goes on to point out that “the A.A. Grapevine since Bill’s death and especially since (editor) Jack M.’s retirement generally tended to avoid any topic that might displease any of the membership.....the magazine carefully eschewed all but the blandest treatments of “the spiritual”. Later on p. 188, he relates that “In the mid-1980s, the Grapevine’s editors seemed most aware of the polarizations that characterized American society. In such an environment, outsiders tended to be suspect of having hidden agendas, and it seemed impossible to treat of the spiritual without treading on someone’s theological toes.”

**ARTFUL LANGUAGE:** I must speak to some of the language being used in the Grapevine and in talks by Trustees. We are being “counseled” to avoid talking about “God” and to share our “experience” instead of our “beliefs”. We have being told that the fundamental faith for members of A.A. is the “hope” they can live sober. We are being “counseled” to have the humility speak of what works for us and not to talk about what will work for others. We are informed that these “admonitions” are being delivered to make atheist and agnostics more comfortable so that more of them will consider A.A. We are informed that “hope” is our spiritual foundation. And finally, we are “advised” that some people will not come to A.A. unless we clarify the distinction within the Fellowship between “religion” and “spirituality”.

I am so sorry to have to even comment on such innocent subtle language. However, these “directives” should not be allowed to stand without question. Almost all of us thought A.A. was some kind of a religious cult or something like one. And yet, when we were driven here by desperation, we found out that A.A. has nothing to do with religion.

Enthusiastic sharing on the subject of “God” allows newer members to witness the enthusiasm of a spiritual life. Instead of a permanent diet of “faith” and “hope”, we get to dine on “conscious contact”. We live with the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered our hearts. I only share my experiences; and they are all about finding God and His importance in my life. I follow that with A.A.’s time honored, “If you want what we have.....” In short, we don’t have a religious problem in A.A.

“Non-believers” and their sympathizers often like to quote p.46 of the Big Book where it says, “To us, the Realm of the Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men.” I agree completely with this statement; without it, I doubt, with my old beliefs, if I could have fit through the door of A.A.



However as we all know, the spiritual path continuously gets narrower and narrower, thereby becoming less inclusive of our old ideas. To make progress, we have to constantly be discarding more of our old ideas and beliefs. The steps force us to move away from our will (ideas) and towards God's. The entrance door to A.A. may be infinitely wide, but the entrance to the 4<sup>th</sup> dimension of existence is a very narrow beam.

It was suggested in the editorial section of the Grapevine that I not speak of "what will work for others". I suppose if I am sponsoring, I now tell the newcomer, "I have no idea if this will work for you. You can try it if it looks like it might work for you, or you could do your own thing and see if you come up with something that is more appropriate for you!"

The twelfth step points to only one "result" from working the steps: a "spiritual awakening". It does not say, "Having gotten sober as a result of these steps--". Sobriety is not the name of the game, God is.

#### THE OPPOSITE EDGE---"DOGMATIC A.A."

However, I will concede to our "Sobriety without God" friends that perhaps some of our Big Book thumpers and our "Back to the Basics" members get a little carried away sometimes with comments that make the Big Book look almost Biblical. Bill W. expressed great concerns that none of our literature ever reach "sacred" status and thereby be treated as an A.A. "Bible". If one looks closely, we see the Big Book is only the treasure map---the real "treasure" is God. We are advised by the Book itself to look to God for answers, not to the Book.

We must always be on the lookout that our egos don't turn us into new "Messiahs" with our own unique brand of A.A. and our own adoring following. We must look closely at our own comments when sharing or speaking and make sure we are serving God and not "ourselves". Good sponsors and friends can help us here and keep our egos in check. We must not get carried away with our own "spirituality". We must not begin to hold classes on the "only absolute correct way of taking the steps". That job is that of a sponsor. On the other hand, we have a definite responsibility to caution newcomers to stay in "mainstream" A.A. and not listen to the "siren" call of the new "A.A. Messiahs". Our recent history gives us examples of the disaster that can follow a brand of A.A. where a small group of "group leaders" totally control the agenda of the group and the sobriety path of each new member.

A.A. AND GOD: There continues to be much misunderstanding about the word "God" both outside of A.A. and inside the Fellowship itself. Part of this comes from the fact that A.A. has never offered any meaningful definition or interpretation of the word. Later in this paper, I present a possible solution to this longstanding problem.

In perhaps what has to be called the "A.A. irony of all ironies", we generally divide into two classes of newcomers: first, the atheist, agnostic, God-haters, non-believers. This group

is sure that A.A., in spite of its cute language about a “Higher Power” and “God as you understand Him”, is really going to lead us to a Christian God; second, the religious, “come-to Jesus”, “churches are the best” newcomers. Surprisingly, they are afraid that A.A. is determined to lead them away from Jesus by flaunting a set of Pagan-sounding Gods such as Spirit of the Universe” and “God as you understand Him”. Soon, both camps learn that they were wrong (it takes a bit longer to actually admit they are wrong) and they find the great comfort on A.A.’s spiritual path has given to the thousands that came before them.

Another cause for the confusion is that people have a tendency to decide for us what we mean when we use the word. Because of using their own definition or interpretation of the word, they erroneously conclude that A.A. may be a religion or is religion-like. This also occurs in A.A. when one member decides for himself what another member meant when that member used the word “God”. This sometimes causes the member to feel discomfort when others use the word “God”. Obviously, such people are creating their own “untruths” and “discomfort” which, unfortunately, can continue to distort their view of A.A. for extended periods of time.

Within A.A., when a person announces their discomfort with the word “God”, assistance should be provided to handle their “resentment”. Resentment about “God” should be handled in the same manner as any other resentment. In this light, an A.A. group need not feel pressure to make any changes to the content of their meetings.

In the beginning of most A.A. member’s spiritual journey, “God” is nothing more than a word. They hear it used at meetings and see it in A.A literature. But for them, it has no personal relevance other than the realization that others obviously find great comfort from it. Perhaps they continue to be plagued by their old ideas about the word. They are advised to set their problems with the “word” aside for now and to keep an open mind.

If they are willing to do this, they are ready to have their sponsor take them through the steps. At some point during this process, “sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly”, the newcomers experience a profound personal transformation and a spiritual awakening. At that point, the word “God” is almost automatically chosen by them to describe the power that transformed them.

You will never see an A.A. member with 25 years referring to his Higher Power as a “doorknob” or another name like that. Newcomers may do it, but the novelty fades quickly. In A.A., “God” is understood by experiencing Him. Because of this “experience”, and because of this experience only, A.A. members find that “the central fact of their lives today is the absolute certainty that their Creator has entered into their hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous”. One could say that the “word” became God.

To get a perfect example of the “God” idea within A.A., consider the one line prayer that was uttered by a completely desperate man, Bill W., as he lay in his hospital bed. Because of this prayer, you and I are here today enjoying a life beyond our dreams. The prayer was, “If there be a God, will He show Himself...”

In conclusion, it would appear that in A.A., the word “God” is used to define the origin or source of the power that transforms individual A.A. members. Spirituality offers a non-religious path to God.

There is absolutely no requirement or need for the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous to make any accommodations whatsoever to resolve self-created “untruths” about the word “God” as it applies to A.A. Our public relations arm can easily help anyone with such a misunderstanding regarding the spiritual nature of our program. The central role of God in A.A. should never be trivialized.

People will not truly seek God unless the need for God has been planted in them. The fatal nature of alcoholism is sufficient to crack the ego just enough for the message of God to enter. If we even suggest to desperate newcomers that mere sobriety (not drinking) can be achieved by attending meetings and living a different life, we may cheat them out of their only opportunity for true freedom from alcohol and a permanent relationship with their Creator. Therefore, it is essential that the crucial moment of desperation be used as the opening through which the light of God can enter. There is no level of human effort which can generate this light!

**NEED FOR A WRITTEN EXPLANATION OF THE WORD “GOD” WHEN IT APPEARS IN A.A. PUBLICATIONS AND WHEN SPOKEN BY A.A. MEMBERS:** The confusion over what is intended by the use of the word “God” has, and continues to plague our Fellowship. Outsiders, as well as newcomers, have to make up their own explanations for the word “God” and then feel discomfort from their own explanations. It is long overdue to make our best effort at providing such a piece of writing.

Perhaps the following could serve as a first draft of such an effort: “When the word “God” is used by A.A. members and in Alcoholics Anonymous literature and publications, it is used to symbolize the “personal transformation” experience occurring to A.A. members as a result of taking the Twelve Steps.

Newly arrived alcoholics almost always have some hostility to the concept of spirituality and to the word “God”. This results from earlier experiences and preconceived concepts about both. Because of their desperation, they can find sufficient willingness and open mindedness to allow them to be guided through the steps which result in a transformation and “personal spiritual awakening”. In order to express what they believe caused the transformation, almost everyone chooses to use the word “God”.

**I urge all of us to study this and reach an agreement on its final form!**

**FEELINGS OF NEWCOMERS:** We now seem to be trying to fight the fatal disease of alcoholism without hurting the feelings of newcomers. When one is new, our feelings are being hurt all the time. Everything about A.A. hurt one of my feelings or another. I was greatly offended by many aspects of A.A. I didn't want anything to do with God or prayer. I didn't want to do a 5<sup>th</sup> step because it was an invasion of my privacy. I didn't want to make amends until after they had made amends to me. The most offensive part of the program, of course, was the not-drinking part. Fortunately, I was told to just keep an open mind and see how things turned out.

**I especially didn't like the Lord's Prayer.** I was told to keep an open mind and eventually I would come to love it. This turned out to be true as it was for all the others who didn't like the prayer. We come to love it as A.A.'s prayer. When I sometimes attend church with a friend and the Lord's Prayer is recited, I think to myself, "Why, they are using our prayer!" A resentment about the Lord's Prayer is still a resentment. I must not try to use the power of the prayer itself in an attempt to elevate my resentment to the status of justified resentment.

When we change any aspect of A.A. to avoid hurting the feelings of anyone, we do them a disservice which could seriously hurt their chances for recovery. We are re-enforcing their self centered approach to life where they demand that the world adjust to them instead of becoming open to the spiritual power enabling them to adjust to the world. Once their relationship with God is right, they will find great joy in the present moment just as it is. To change anything about the 12 steps to placate an individual alcoholic is to weaken the program for the rest of us. We don't need 100 ways of staying sober, we are doing fine with the one we have had for 75 years.

**DEAR READER: "If you are not convinced on these vital issues, you ought to re-read the paper to this point or else throw it away!"**

#### **A.A.W.S. and the GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE**

**BILL W. EXPECTED THE PRESENCE OF GOD TO BE PART OF THE ENTIRE SERVICE STRUCTURE AND THAT A TOP PRIORITY BE GIVEN TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE TWELVE STEPS AND TRADITIONS.**

The beautiful language contained in the 6<sup>th</sup> Warranty speaks volumes to this matter. Bill W. writes, “Freedom under God to grow in His likeness and image will ever be the quest of the Alcoholics Anonymous. May our General Service Conference be always seen as a chief symbol of this cherished liberty.”

Earlier in the 6<sup>th</sup> Warranty when discussing the right of an A.A. Group to conduct its internal affairs as it wishes, he writes, “We know that we personally have to choose conformity to A.A.’s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions or else face dissolution and death, both as individuals and as groups.” In other words, the autonomy of a Group calling itself A.A. does NOT include changing or eliminating the steps.

Failure to conform to this critical requirement to even be considered an A.A. group should result in the group being prohibited from calling itself an A.A. group. Should it continue to violate warnings about this mandate, we can keep in mind that the Conference, in 1972, added to the “protection of the A.A. name” as discussed at the end of Warranty 5 (p.74 Service Manual) by legally registering both Alcoholics Anonymous and the letters A.A.

While legal action is likely to never be taken, its existence is there for all to see.

On the same page, Bill writes, “...we here specially enjoin our “General Service Conference to abstain completely from any and all acts of authoritative government which could in any wise curtail A.A.’s freedom under God.” (Emphasis added)

In Concept 1, Bill explains reasons behind the basic shift of ultimate responsibility and authority from Bill and Dr. Bob to A.A. as a whole and not to its Delegates and Trustees themselves. The first reason came from Tradition Two where it states that, for groups, the ultimate authority is “...a loving God as He may express Himself in the group conscience.” At the first experimental General Service Conference in 1951, attention was focused to see if Tradition Two (i.e.: final authority being a loving God) could be successfully applied to A.A. as a whole, including its Trustees and founders. In 1955 in St. Louis, the Fellowship became convinced that the God inspired “group conscience” was “going to work and work permanently”. See p. 8. (Emphasis added)

Bill wraps up the discussion of Concept 1 with very moving and spiritual words as follows: “...that we see in our Fellowship, a spiritualized society characterized by enough enlightenment, enough responsibility and enough love of man and of God to insure that our democracy of world service will work under all conditions.” And later we find, “...we old-timers have now vested in A.A.’s General Service Conference the authority for giving shape—through the labors of its chosen Delegates, Trustees, and service workers—to the destiny that we trust God in His wisdom is holding in store for all of us.” See p.9. (Emphasis added)

Therefore, it is plain to see that the power and guidance of God is to be present at all levels of our Fellowship. It must permeate to the Trustees and especially to the Staff. After all, it is the staff that has the great power to decide exactly what form the draft of a pamphlet or video will take. If this initial action lacks spiritual inspiration and guidance, the human ego is sure to reign. We must take action in this area especially. I, personally, have never been to A.A. meetings in New York City. But I assume because of their immediate proximity to much of A.A.'s roots, discussion of God and spirituality is especially welcome.

**MY RIGHT TO WRITE THIS PAPER:** In deciding to write this paper, I find comfort in Bill's words about Concept II where he says, that the power of groups and members to criticize the operation of the world service structure is "virtually supreme". See p. 10. (Emphasis added) By writing this paper, I am exercising one of the most important "rights" given to individual A.A. members.

#### GROWTH

When I think about the subject of trying to "grow" A.A., I think of Bill's words of counsel in Warranty 5 when he says on p. 73, "We have no doctrine that has to be maintained. We have no membership that has to be enlarged. We have no authority that has to be supported. We have no prestige, power, or pride that has to be satisfied. And we have no property or money that is really worth quarreling about." (Emphasis added)

Perhaps, alcoholics are getting sober elsewhere. We should rejoice in this fact. Perhaps, heavy drinkers who aren't alcoholics of the hopeless variety are being helped by therapy membership in a support group. Many churches who, after years of having an A.A. group in the basement, asked themselves why they couldn't get their own members sober using our 12 steps. If the groups they started are working, so much the better. We should celebrate recovery outside of A.A. as much as we do inside the Fellowship.

We continue to visit jails and institutions, to run PSAs, to assist in foreign countries, and to speak to the professional communities. We are being very responsible to see the hand of A.A. is there. The results are up to God.

The idea of somehow increasing A.A. membership by diluting its message and, thereby, making it more enticing to would-be members is simply not being honest with ourselves. It would be like a bar lowering prices by diluting its drinks in order to lure in more customers. When an alcoholic arrives in A.A., we are responsible that he be shown the same path to a spiritual awakening that we were shown and nothing less!

When we look to the future, we certainly don't want to see an A.A. public service announcement along these lines: "Got a problem with alcohol? There is probably an A.A. meeting near where you live. Our twelve steps are not mandatory! God will not be

**mentioned! You can keep all your beliefs! You will be assisted in finding your own path to sobriety! Confidentiality guaranteed! Call today!”**

**Therefore, we have to be careful that, like the above-mentioned bar, we are not trying to grow for the sake of money. This can never be our motive. After all, why some people come to A.A. and others don't, and why some who come get sober and others don't, will always be a mystery. When we accept this, we fully understand that the overall plan for A.A.'s future is in the hands of God.**

**I loved the words of Massachusetts's Margaret C., with her 50 years of sobriety, at the 59<sup>th</sup> General Service Conference. I had the privilege of knowing Margaret in my early sobriety and of hearing her speak. I was always greatly moved by her words. Here are the final words she used as printed in the Conference Report, “Your turn to hold this legacy that has been left to us, gently keeping it safe and undiluted for all those who shall follow us.” I find it quite coincidental and revealing that she chose that particular word.**

#### **MAIN REASONS FOR OBJECTING TO ATHEIST/AGNOSTIC GROUPS**

- 1. Such groups will adversely affect the unity of Alcoholics Anonymous – Tradition One**
- 2. Such groups will not be guided by a loving God as expressed in their group conscience— Tradition Three**
- 3. Such groups will adversely affect groups in their area and A.A. as a whole – Tradition Four**
- 4. By condoning the existence of an atheist A.A. group, A.A. is clearly taking a position that it endorses the atheism itself. This surely constitutes taking an opinion on an outside issue in violation of Tradition Ten.**
- 5. The broad language in the long form of Tradition Three (“Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.”) has unfortunately been interpreted as tying our hands so that we literally have to charter any group that meets these requirements. For example, two of us could start a group that used physical fitness as a means of obtaining sobriety and get a charter with the name “The In Shape Group”. Common sense would dictate against doing this.**

**Somehow, our policy should prevent any group from calling itself an A.A. group unless it carries the message of sobriety precisely as laid out in the Big Book and the 12x12. No group should change the steps or officially disregard major portions of our literature and continue to call itself an A.A. Group. A.A. will surely lose its unity if we don't insist on preserving the consistency of our message. Some of these groups actually “ignore” those portions of the Big Book and the 12x12 that are not “appropriate” for them.**

We simply should not give tacit approval to these special composition groups on the basis of their particular beliefs about God. This would clearly open the door for many likely conflicts within A.A. For example, a “Jesus” group could argue that it technically had no outside affiliation with any specific religion such as Catholic or Protestant and request a charter solely based on their beliefs. The same would apply to a New Age group or a Jungian group.

**NON BELIEVER:** The term “non-believer” as applied to atheists and agnostics is actually quite misleading and, therefore, is often perceived as a very innocuous looking term (more artful language). The beliefs of an atheist are incredibly strong. While atheists and agnostics may not believe “in” God, they do indeed have very strong beliefs “about” God. Atheists believe in the non-existence of God and agnostics believe that the existence of God cannot be ascertained. As in religion, the central force in atheism and agnosticism is God. Without a God, there would be no religion, atheism, or agnosticism. Each of them constitutes a belief system of its own.

To my atheist friends, I would say this. Many of us believed as you do. We eventually changed our minds and found a great treasure. How can we not want to share this wonderful gift? Please consider the language of the First Tradition carefully: “We believe there isn’t a fellowship on earth which lavishes more devoted care upon its individual members; surely there is none which more jealously guards the individual’s right to think, talk, and act as he wishes.”---- “however later we find that the, “Realization dawns that he is but a small part of a great whole; that no personal sacrifice is too great for preservation of the Fellowship. He learns that the clamor of desires and ambitions within him must be silenced whenever these could damage the group. It becomes plain that the group must survive or the individual will not.”

**PROVIDING THE READER WITH MATERIAL SUPPORTING THE ATHEIST/AGNOSTIC POSITION:** To give balance to this paper and to give the reader the rationale of those supporting Atheist/Agnostic A.A. groups, I have included in Encl. #5 (Google – “AA-History-Proposals to create a pamphlet for non-believers”) a lengthy accounting of the History of Proposal to Create a Pamphlet for the Non-Believer/Agnostic/Atheist Alcoholic. I have reviewed carefully the letters and papers by those defending the approach of “sobriety without God”. While they make many fine points, I believe the long-term damage to A.A. from such a policy far exceeds the benefits which are marginal at best.

**REAL ATHEISTS VS THOSE WHO FEEL THEY ARE ATHEISTS:**

Practically all newcomers are uncomfortable with the word “God” and about half of us felt we were atheists or agnostics. A.A. gently led us to down a spiritual path until we had the sudden realization that, “God was doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.” It is



being suggested that A.A. groups now try to ascertain the difference between a person who feels he is an atheist/agnostic and “real agnostic/atheists”. Considering that this will occur when the newcomer is still shaky and confused, this is quite a challenge.

Having miraculously made this distinction, the A.A. group is being asked to then dispense with the normal step process for the “real” agnostic/atheists enabling them to hold onto all of their beliefs. Further, the group would make sure that no member of the group put pressure on them to seek a power greater than human power. The thought of implementing such a policy within an A.A. group seems to practically guarantee one chaotic situation after another, not to mention the confusion it would cause in the minds of all of the other newcomers. The fact that something like this is even under discussion is surely a symptom of something fundamentally wrong in the unity of our fellowship.

**PARRALLEL SITUATION FOR ANOTHER GROUP OF A.A. MEMBERS.** Another group of A.A. members who oftentimes encounter within A.A. an adverse reaction of an even greater magnitude is, oddly enough, devoutly Religious members, especially Christians. The mere mention during a meeting that “Jesus” is one’s higher power could easily bring a loud retort that “A.A. is not a religion!” Of course, specifically mentioning other personal higher powers such as a doorknob, Mother Nature, the West End Group, Buddha, the North Star, or “plate tectonics” is quite acceptable. The current trend is that one can mention any specific personal higher power during a meeting except Jesus!

This narrowness also applies to mentioning books. We often find ourselves fortunate enough to hear members recite a spiritual poem they like or they mention the help they have received from the Twenty Four Hour a Day book, New Pair of Glasses, The Road Less Traveled and many others. This practice is relatively benign. However, a simple quote from the Bible could easily bring a critical remark.

It seems that Christian references during a meeting in many areas of the Country are singled out for reproach or, if not, then for silent disapproval. My religious friends often ask me why special adverse treatment is reserved for them. I have no answer.

Further, during a sharing session at a discussion meeting or during an A.A. talk, caustic references are sometimes made about those “Bible-Thumpers” or “Jesus Lovers” outside of the Fellowship. We all need to inventory ourselves in this area. Such comments are no different than derogatory comments about gays or blacks!

Nevertheless, Religious A.A. members have come up with an excellent solution to their problem. In order to hold meetings where they could freely mention that Jesus was their higher power, they sought A.A.’s permission to use the 12 steps in established Christian recovery programs outside of A.A. and not using the A.A. name! They can attend their regular A.A. meetings and then get together in groups such as “Alcoholics Victorious”. I have enclosed in Encl. #6 an extensive accounting of this organization and their remarkably large meeting list to show how successful such a solution can be when initiated outside of

A.A. [www.alcoholicsvictorious.org](http://www.alcoholicsvictorious.org). Imagine the reaction if they had instead sought to have a pamphlet for Jesus believers and for Jesus groups within A.A.! Now, their members can both enjoy the wonderful A.A. society and then freely meet with others with the same beliefs and not use the A.A. name.

## OVERALL DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, the central force in religion, atheism, and agnosticism is God. Absent God, none of the three would exist. All of them continue their existence by practicing their individual beliefs and by zealously spreading these beliefs to others. Religion spreads the word to “save souls” by bringing God into the lives of those who do not believe. Atheists, and to some extent agnostics, spread a message of advancing a high level of spiritual human existence without the need for God; and to minimize (eliminate, if possible,) the discussion of God or the promotion of the God beliefs in their presence.

It is this latter practice which, if it were to occur on a widespread basis in A.A., would cause a painful, divisive, and completely unnecessary schism in our fellowship. Two completely opposing belief systems simply cannot co-exist. The attempted removal of the mention of “God” from A.A. or the pressure to lessen God’s presence within A.A. simply must not occur. Our long term survival depends totally on the grace of God.

To further examine the consequences of a wider awareness of atheism within A.A., consider the plight of a relatively new A.A. member (2-5 years). Like all new to A.A., this person has gone through the struggle of getting rid of his or her old ideas about God mainly by keeping an open mind and has been blessed by the experience of a spiritual awakening. No doubt in the beginning, their mind was pried open by the realization (from their sponsor and the Dr.’s Opinion) that unless they found a power greater than themselves, they would certainly face dying a horrible alcoholic death. Therefore, they persisted in abandoning their old ideas and now are enjoying a new and exciting, but somewhat fragile, relationship with their God.

Imagine what is likely to happen in their minds when they suddenly discover that there exists separate A.A. Groups of alcoholics just like them who are getting and staying sober without any God or prayer whatsoever! It is easy to conclude that such revelations could be both shocking and destabilizing. At a minimum, it would require creative explaining from their sponsor. I came up with the following explanation:

When I meet or hear about an atheist A.A. member who has achieved long term sobriety without the help of a power greater than human power, I am left to explain to myself how this is possible in the context of A.A. I have come up with 5 possible explanations for myself:

1. The atheist member is not really an alcoholic of the hopeless variety.
2. The “Doctor’s Opinion”, the 12x12, and the Big Book are incorrect in their assessment that the disease of alcoholism can only be conquered through the grace of a power greater than human power.
3. The A.A. group itself provides sufficient power to lift the alcoholic to a place of mere (not-drinking) sobriety.
4. The power inherent in Atheism is equivalent to the power of God.
5. The sobriety of the atheist is actually due to the grace of God as transmitted through the love and acceptance of the A.A. members at the meetings he attends

I certainly don’t want to see the day when the next edition of the Big Book is pressured into containing two or three stories of relying on atheism or agnosticism for staying sober. I don’t want to see breakout sessions for “Nonbelievers” at all our conferences. And I certainly don’t want to hear lectures on “Sobriety without God” at our next International. You may find it hard to say “no” to these ideas today, but in ten years, it will be impossible.

#### TIME FOR A DECISION

It is time to make the tough decision of whether we want to continue to allow the development of two A.A.’s: the first consisting of a path to sobriety using human power alone; the second, adhering to the belief that the only path to sobriety is through a God of your understanding. These two diametrically opposing belief systems simply cannot coexist! We should never be forced into the position of informing newcomers, or any member of A.A., that A.A. offers two alternative paths. If we try to water down the spirituality of A.A. to make it more “inclusive”, we will ruin it forever and for everybody! A.A. already has always been, and continues to be, the most inclusive society in the world.

Are we going to continue to allow, even encourage, the disregarding of those portions of the Big Book and the 12x12 which are found to be inconvenient? Are we even going to stand by while our precious 12 Steps and Traditions are slowly eroded in order that A.A. accommodate every situation that comes its way?

What precisely are we going to offer to the alcoholic of the future who is blindly wandering in the desert of alcoholism slowly dying of spiritual thirst and who stumbles upon the A.A. oasis? Will it be the clear and pure spiritual water that has been found here for 75 years which has worked one miracle after another? Or, will it be like the water of the Dead Sea, initially causing great exhilaration and hope; but in the end, offering nothing at all to quench the spiritual longing that has driven him for years?

Fellow Members of Alcoholics Anonymous, we are allowing in our very midst the initiation and promotion of a path called “Sobriety without God”. What if a newcomer of the future is encouraged to choose that selection instead of the traditional Twelve Step path? And what if, as a result, he ends up with a somewhat acceptable “water-wagon sobriety” instead

of the promised “spiritual awakening of the twelfth step. Are we not guilty of duplicity of the highest order and can we any longer think of ourselves as “trusted servants”? After all, the power we are serving is clearly God Himself!

**RECCOMENDATION:** The path taken by Alcoholics Victorious and similar groups is clearly the path that A.A. should advocate with respect to separate groups for alcoholic atheists and agnostics. This would do nothing to change personal participation in their A.A. groups and other A.A. activities. They would continue to be welcomed and loved within A.A., but their groups would be formed outside of A.A. and not use the A.A. name. There already exists an organization known as Atheists And Agnostics Anonymous (AAAA). A list of all newly formed meetings would easily be accessible to all who needed such an environment.

We must insist that the central role of God be given its rightful place in all future pamphlets, A.A. publications, A.A. videos, and speeches by its trusted servants.

In doing so, these actions would give a tremendous boost to A.A.’s most precious tradition-its unity! Of course, A.A. should continue to openly and lovingly welcome all types of believers as it has done for 75 years, but it can never even tacitly embrace Atheism or Agnosticism as a part of A.A.

As we look ahead to the International in Atlanta, GA in 2015, we can look in two directions for its theme: the first, ours: “One Ultimate Authority” or the second, theirs: “Let’s celebrate our differences!” What is our choice?

**FIN**

“The biggest enemy of the best is the good.” -- Frequent admonition of Bill W.

“There is only one problem which includes all problems. That problem is conscious separation from God. And there is only one solution which includes all solutions. That solution is conscious contact with God.” -----Chuck C.

## WHITE PAPER ENCLOSURES

**Encl. #1 Quotes from the Big Book and the 12x12 which clearly delineate A.A.'s guidance for working with new members who are atheist or agnostic.**

**Encl. #2 Agnostic A.A., which includes the Agnostic Preamble and Agnostic Twelve Steps. State by state breakdown of Atheist/Agnostic groups in U.S. together with a list of Atheist A.A. Groups by name and location in the U.S.A. [www.agnosticAAnyc.org](http://www.agnosticAAnyc.org)**

**Encl. #3 QUAD A CHICAGO – Description of Quad A and list of atheist/agnostic meetings in Chicago (Google “Quad A Chicago”)**

**Encl. #4 Minneapolis Atheist/Agnostic meeting. [www.aaMinneapolis.org](http://www.aaMinneapolis.org) click “meetings” enter “agnostic” in “search” box.**

**Encl. #5 History-Proposals to Create a Pamphlet for the Non-Believer/Agnostic/Atheist Alcoholic. GOOGLE the following “AA-history-proposals to create a pamphlet for non-believers”**

**Encl. #6 complete list of Christian recovery meetings for alcoholics known as Alcoholics Victorious [www.alcoholicsvictorious.org](http://www.alcoholicsvictorious.org)**

## ENCLOSURE 1

QUOTES FROM BIG BOOK AND 12X12 WHICH CLEARLY DELINEATE A.A.'S SUGGESTED GUIDANCE FOR WORKING WITH NEW ALCOHOLICS WHO ARE AGNOSTIC OR ATHEIST.

“So, practicing these Steps, we had a spiritual awakening about which finally there was no question. Looking at those who were only beginning and still doubted themselves, the rest of us were able to see the change setting in. From great numbers of such experiences, we could predict that the doubter who still claimed that he hadn’t got the “spiritual angle”, and who still considered his well-loved A.A. group the higher power, would presently love God and call Him by name.” (12x12 p. 109)

“You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen one single case recover, where that state of mind existed to the extent that it does in you.” Roland felt “as though the gates of hell had closed on him with a clang.” He asked, “Is there no exception?..... Here and there, once in a while, alcoholics have had what are called vital spiritual experiences. To me these occurrences are phenomena. They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them.” (Dr. Jung BB P.27)

“One feels that something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change.....They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks...” (BB pages xvii and xxviii- Doctor’s Opinion)

“The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink.— His defense must come from a Higher Power.” (BB p.43)

“Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God’s help.” (BB p.62)

“We never gave the spiritual side of life a fair hearing.” (BB p.50)

“It has been well said that “almost the only scoffers at prayer are those who never tried it enough.” (12x12 p. 97)

“But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life—or else. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted.” (BB p. 44)

**“My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, “Why don’t you choose your own conception of God?” (BB p. 12)**

**“Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another’s conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction...” (BB p. 46)**

**“Consequently, in Step Three we turned our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. For the time being, we who were atheist or agnostic discovered that our own group, or AA as a whole, would suffice as a higher power.” (12x12 p. 107)**

**“Take is easy. The hoop you have to jump through is a lot wider than you think. At least I found it so. So did a friend of mine who was a one-time vice-president of the American Atheist Society, but he got through with room to spare.” (12x12 step 2, p. 26)**

**“Many an AA, once agnostic or atheist tells us that it was during this stage of Step Five that he first actually felt the presence of God.” (12X12 P.62)**

**“When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is or He isn’t. What was our choice to be?” (BB p. 53)**

**(Working With Others) “Stress the spiritual feature freely. If the man be agnostic or atheist, make it emphatic that he does not have to agree with your conception of God. He can choose any conception he likes, provided it makes sense to him. The main thing is that he be willing to believe in a Power greater than himself and that he live by spiritual principles.” (BB p. 93)**

**“Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in every man, woman, and child is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other, it is there..... We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes, we had to search fearlessly, but He was there.” (BB p. 55)**

**“But He has come to all who have honestly sought Him...When we drew near to Him, He disclosed Himself to us!” (BB p. 57)**

**“We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.” (BB p. 84)**

**“We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.” (BB p. 75)**

**“We have found much of heaven, and we have been rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed.” (BB p. 25)**

**“The central fact of lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous.” (BB p. 25)**

**(Emphasis added)**





## Agnostic Twelve Steps

For agnostics who would like to work the steps, this version of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous provides slightly different wording of the six steps that make reference to God or a Higher Power. This version of the Twelve Steps seems to have originated in agnostic A.A. groups in California.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2. Came to believe and to accept that we needed strengths beyond our awareness and resources to restore us to sanity.**  
[Original: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.]
- 3. Made a decision to entrust our will and our lives to the care of the collective wisdom and resources of those who have searched before us.**  
[Original: Made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him.*]
- 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**
- 5. Admitted to ourselves without reservation, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**  
[Original: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.]
- 6. Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character.**  
[Original: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.]
- 7. With humility and openness sought to eliminate our shortcomings.**  
[Original: Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.]
- 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.**
- 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.**

**10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.**

**11. Sought through meditation to improve our spiritual awareness and our understanding of the AA way of life and to discover the power to carry out that way of life.**

[Original: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.]

**12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

## The Agnostic Preamble

At the beginning of our meetings, after the A.A. preamble is read, the chairperson reads the following "agnostic preamble":

*This group of A.A. attempts to maintain a tradition of free expression, and conduct a meeting where alcoholics may feel free to express any doubts or disbeliefs they may have, and to share their own personal form of spiritual experience, their search for it, or their rejection of it. We do not endorse or oppose any form of religion or atheism. Our only wish is to assure suffering alcoholics that they can find sobriety in A.A. without having to accept anyone else's beliefs or having to deny their own.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q. What's an agnostic?**

**A. "Agnosticism" literally means "not knowing" as regards the existence or nature of God. It's a convenient word to encompass the variety of beliefs and non-beliefs held by our individual members. Recovering alcoholics who attend the agnostic A.A. groups come together knowing that sobriety can be attained by anyone with the help of A.A. fellowship and principles, without necessarily relying on a Higher Power.**

Q. Are these legitimate A.A. groups?

A. Of course. As the Third Tradition says, "The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking." We are listed in the Meeting Book published by New York Inter-Group, and we are listed on their [web site](#). Our groups are listed with the General Service Office (GSO) and most have a General Service Representative (GSR).

Q. What are your meetings like?

A. They're quite similar to other A.A. meetings around New York City. Most meetings feature a speaker sharing his or her "experience, strength, and hope" followed by sharing by other members of the group. Other meetings feature readings from A.A. and non-A.A. literature and topic discussions.

Q. Do you conclude your meeting with a prayer?

A. No. At the end of the meeting, the chairperson usually reads the declaration made at the 30th anniversary international convention of Alcoholics Anonymous: "Whenever anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that I am responsible." Then, the members hold hands in a circle and repeat the slogan:

*Live and Let Live!*

Q. Do you folks work the steps?

A. Some do, some don't. Some rely solely on the Fellowship for their recovery and they find it works well for them. Others who do make use of the steps often use the [Agnostic 12 Steps](#) for this purpose. Others substitute the phrase "group of drunks" or "good

orderly direction" for the word "God" in the steps.

**Q. How do these groups make use of the Big Book?**

**A. Frankly, we don't use it very often. Most of our members find Chapter 4 ("We Agnostics") to be particularly condescending and not helpful to their sobriety. The A.A. publication we like the most is *Living Sober*, a work written from a more-secular point of view and offering much practical advice.**

**Q. Am I welcome to one of your meetings if I'm religious, or if I think of God as my higher power?**

**A. Certainly. The agnostic A.A. meetings provide a home for recovering alcoholics of various beliefs. Our members simply appreciate an atmosphere where belief is not made a prerequisite for sobriety.**