

AA Agnostica

A space for AA agnostics, atheists and freethinkers worldwide



Many Paths to Spirituality

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A.A. - a kinship of common suffering

“Newcomers are approaching A.A. at the rate of tens of thousands yearly. They represent almost every belief and attitude imaginable. We have atheists and agnostics. We have people of nearly every race, culture and religion. In A.A. we are supposed to be bound together in the kinship of a common suffering. Consequently, the full individual liberty to practice any creed or principle or therapy whatever should be a first consideration for us all. Let us not, therefore, pressure anyone with our individual or even our collective views. Let us instead accord each other the respect and love that is due to every human being as he tries to make his way toward the light. Let us always try to be inclusive rather than exclusive; let us remember that each alcoholic among us is a member of A.A., so long as he or she so declares.”

-Bill W (A.A. Grapevine, July 1965)

A misconception about Alcoholics Anonymous is that it is a religious organization. Since A.A. groups often rent space in churches, attending an A.A. meeting in a church basement can reinforce that impression, and the possibility of hearing a prayer at the end of a meeting can further cement the idea for some.

Yet A.A.'s pioneering members realized from the beginning that their sole purpose was to help people gain sobriety, and they went to great lengths to ensure the broadest membership among all who suffer from alcoholism. A.A. is a Fellowship, a community of like-minded sufferers who have found a way out of a hopeless condition.

We came to A.A. out of desperation to stop drinking, or reeling from the consequences of our actions while drunk. A.A.'s sense of community and partnership is strong because of our shared suffering and our shared solution. In our meetings people from all walks of life come together with a common purpose. Some members return to their religious roots, others find different spiritual paths. Some may

find this “God of their understanding,” yet never become involved with organized religion. Still others make the A.A. group itself their higher power.

But one thing was sure - whatever our backgrounds, our beliefs or our lack of belief - our drinking had gotten out of hand.

We needed help

Alcoholism can be a lonely affair. Often, we drank to keep the pain of life at arm’s length, and then, when the pain overran us, we drank to wash it away. For some of us, things didn’t seem so bleak. We felt we could control our drinking - except when we couldn’t. We recognized that our lives would be a lot less chaotic if we could stop drinking, but we didn’t know how. We tried different strategies - drinking beer only, not drinking on an empty stomach, having just two drinks a night - but sooner or later we ended up drunk again, wondering what went wrong.

And it wasn’t just ourselves we were hurting. Our families, friends, employers and even complete strangers began to pull away from us, wary of our denials and skeptical of our many lies and pledges to stay sober.

“I knew I was an alcoholic before I came to A.A. I had attended management training courses on how to identify drug and alcohol problems in my employees - and I clearly fit the description. In addition, I am trained as a scientist and an engineer. The objective evidence was all around me - empty gin bottles, webs of lies, damaged relationships and self-loathing. I had also tried unsuccessfully to quit drinking on my own for several years, so I knew that I needed help.”

We reached out

A time came when we could no longer look the other way and pretend that we were in control of our drinking. Angry, defiant and suspicious as we were, something had to be done.

Asking for help didn’t come easily to many of us. We saw it as a sign of weakness or a character flaw. But when we finally did surrender and reach out for help with our drinking, we got back far more than we expected.

“I met with a doctor who specialized in addiction treatment. He encouraged me to go to A.A. meetings and listen. I did, and soon something deep inside me began shifting. The Fellowship gave me hope - hope that I didn’t have to die drunk, that there was another way.

”My world had been so dark for so long that I grabbed onto that thin strand of hope with all my might.”

We found sobriety - and some obstacles

Having finally found something that worked in our struggle against alcohol, we clung to A.A. like a drowning person clutches onto a life raft. But some of us soon encountered some questions about spirituality that seemed to present obstacles to our full acceptance of the A.A. program. Based on our prior beliefs - or the lack thereof - we felt at odds with what we perceived to be a religious approach to A.A., or pressure to adopt certain religious or spiritual concepts in order to remain in A.A.

“When I arrived in A.A. at age 50, broken in every way, I was immediately faced with a distressing and essential conflict. I knew almost immediately that A.A. was my only hope and I saw that the spiritual dimension of the program was unavoidable. And yet my rejection of any form of divinity was absolute; my agnostic/atheistic view was as essential to my being as the shape of my hands or the sound of my voice.

“Coming to believe in a higher power, however I defined it, seemed wholly impossible, and yet absolutely essential if I was to survive my disease, which had taken me to a level of demoralization and despair I could not have imagined possible.”

Working the A.A. Program

Recognizing, first of all, that we needed to stay sober, many of us began to discover that we could utilize the A.A. program without conforming to religious or spiritual concepts we either disagreed with or didn't have. As we became more familiar with A.A., we began to realize the deep significance in the phrasing of A.A.'s Twelve Steps, which emphasize “a Power greater than ourselves,” and “God, as we understand him.”

These words and A.A.'s traditional commitment to inclusivity provided comfort to many of us, leaving the door to spirituality open for alcoholics of all faiths, beliefs, and practices, and allowing each of us to determine for himself or herself just what to believe.

“In trying to find something to believe in, I read books about philosophy, spirituality and eastern religions. I listened to people share in meetings and tried to believe in their higher power. I even tried prayer and going back to church. But, in spite of my efforts to ‘educate myself’ into a higher power, I didn't know what I believed. But I knew that the days I prayed seemed to go better than the days I didn't, even when I thought I was praying to my bed spread.”

Many paths to spirituality

Many of us came to rely on a “Higher Power,” whether it was the collective power of A.A., the A.A. group itself, or some other entity, concept or being that helped us to stay sober.

“My sponsor encouraged me to choose my own conception of a higher power. It didn't need a gender, or a name, or any human attributes - it just had to be ‘a power greater than myself’. It was then that I realized that the Fellowship, though comprised of human beings, represented a power greater than anything human. Even more surprisingly, by taking the Steps in my own clumsy way, supported by the unconditional love of my fellow alcoholics, I had discovered a quiet, inner voice - a God within.”

There were many other ideas and approaches, too, that helped us move forward in staying sober and understanding how the A.A. program could work best for us.

“By incorporating basic Buddhist practices with my A.A. practices - regular meetings, doing service, working with newcomers, living the Steps and reading A.A. literature - I have discovered an awesome way to improve my conscious contact with the God of my understanding and live life on life's terms in relative serenity. I still have anxieties,



anger and all the rest of the emotions that come with life, but, bit by bit, I am able to manage them.”

Many of us come from different belief systems and cultures, yet there has always been plenty of latitude in A.A. for members to practice whatever belief works best for them.

“I am a Sioux/Blackfoot woman. I have been sober in A.A. for many years. Many of us believe in the Great Spirit, and it was a great relief to find out I could believe in a Higher Power of my choice. I didn’t have to give up any part of my beliefs when I joined A.A. I could live in the white man’s world, but also retain all of my people’s Native traditions, customs, and ceremonies. In fact, A.A. made my beliefs stronger. My joining A.A. didn’t restrict me, it gave me more freedom. “

The spirit of tolerance is strong in A.A., and members of all faiths and traditions find common ground in our program of recovery.

“I’m a devout, lifelong Catholic. That is an integral part of my experience, strength and hope. I call my higher power God and do not feel I should have to qualify that every time I speak at a meeting. I’m perfectly okay with others’ referring to Buddha, Mohammed, Yahweh, or whatever name they call their higher power.

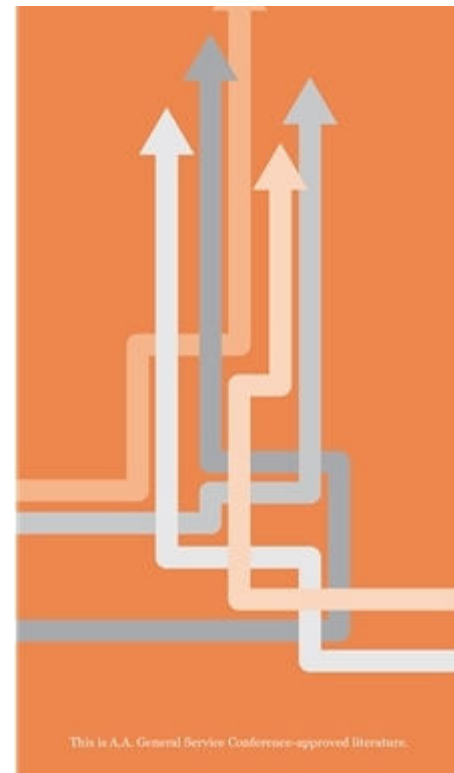
“I’m uncomfortable, though, with anyone citing the Bible, the Koran, the Talmud, or any non-A.A. literature as the truth in an A.A. meeting. But I certainly give them the right to refer to or even quote (briefly) from any of these texts if it’s part of their A.A. experience.

“In my eighteen years of recovery, I have heard plenty of inappropriate talk about religion, and I probably will again ... But so far I haven’t found it necessary to take a drink over any of it, and more than once, it has caused me to experience unexpected spiritual growth. And that’s the point, isn’t it?

For many of us, sobriety was a gift - freely given and freely received. Yet we have to do our part in maintaining it.

“I’m still an agnostic. But I have discovered that the program will work for anyone who will let it. I didn’t have to find a way to make it work. It will work perfectly well on its own, provided I’m willing to do some work myself.

“The first thing I had to do was resign from the debating society. That didn’t mean I started agreeing with everything I heard. It means only that I listened, without arguing, used what I could use, and filed the rest for future reference.



“The second thing I did was to become an active member of my home group, which happened to be my sponsor’s home group. (I’d gotten a sponsor immediately. I already knew that was one thing I’d better do right away.) I saw that whatever else spirituality might consist of, it had to include being of maximum service to my fellow alcoholics, whether or not they were still suffering.”

In working the program, we came to a better understanding of spirituality and the part it plays in our recovery.

”When I first came to A.A., I thought that religion and spirituality were the same thing. But I’ve come to realize that religion means being committed to a practice of belief, and being spiritual means actively living life through a life-giving force. I believe this is any power greater than myself, whether I choose to call it God, Allah, Higher Power, Creative Intelligence, or the power of good.

“I don’t have a specific religious faith that I practice or church that I go to. Matter of fact, I haven’t been in a sanctuary for some time. But I do try to practice the principles of the A.A. program. Through this, I believe that my Higher Power lives within and through me, and that is my sanctuary.”

With time, we came to recognize that we could stay sober and enjoy full membership in the Fellowship, regardless of our beliefs.

“When I finally admitted I was an alcoholic and came into the program four years ago, I thought, ‘Oh God, why me?’ We Jews were supposed to be immune to alcoholism, we were the ‘Chosen Ones’ - or so my denial told me. Yet today I am doubly blessed; I am a grateful, recovering, Jewish alcoholic.

“It took me a long time to separate Judaism from alcoholism, to accept that spirituality did not affect or change my religious beliefs, but enhanced them, that my Higher Power was not the same as yours, that praying and the posture I use to pray does not alter my Jewishness but is necessary for my recovery. Today I can even recite the Lord’s Prayer without feeling guilty since it was pointed out to me in ‘How it Works’ that I have to go to any length to get and stay sober.

“During my years of alcohol abuse I alienated my self from my family, my friends, the world, and even myself. I forgot the joy of my religion and the feeling of prayer. Now that I am recovering, I am able to accept people in my life, I can accept and love me and I am capable of rejoining the human race.”

As A.A. has grown and taken root literally around the world, cutting across lines of gender, race, language and religion, the Fellowship has kept its doors open to alcoholics of all beliefs, supported by two basic principles found in A.A.’s Traditions: that A.A. has but one primary purpose - that of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers, and the recognition that the only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

“My sponsor was well versed in A.A.’s Twelve Steps, Traditions and Concepts. He had a substantial service history and talked to me about the 36 principles upon which A.A. was founded. It is these principles that I would ultimately turn my life and my will over to.

“This God - ‘good orderly direction’ - as represented by the two million or so alcoholics who are members of this global Fellowship, is what I have accepted.

“Living inside of the Steps, the ongoing efforts to promote the unity spoken of in the Traditions, and the discipline we find in applying the Concepts in the way we do business, both internally and with the world at large - these are the things that have provided me with a power greater than myself.

“A.A., I believe, is truly universal, and this conscience that has changed the lives of so many, and continues saving the lives of so many more is worthy of my devotion. I have never seen or felt anything more spiritual than what I witness when I see the transformation that takes place as people begin to live this way of life. “

A source of power

Spiritual experience in A.A. is broad and varied, and for those members who struggle with spiritual concepts, ongoing sobriety often brings the realization that - in some remarkable and unforeseen way - they have indeed experienced a spiritual change.

”When I was a newcomer, I could not understand the concepts of spirituality or faith. I had no God of my understanding. I battled to understand what spirituality meant.

“In reading Appendix II in the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, I have come to understand the profound changes that come from spirituality. The appendix says, ‘With few exceptions our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves. Most of us think this awareness ... is the essence of spiritual experience. ‘

“The appendix continues: ‘We find that no one need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. Willingness, honesty and open-mindedness are the essentials of recovery. But these are indispensable.”

Some refer to a “spiritual awakening,” a phrase found in the Twelfth Step and throughout A.A. literature. In Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (page 106), Bill W. writes about spiritual awakenings:

“Maybe there are as many definitions of spiritual awakening as there are people who have had them. But certainly each genuine one has something in common with all the others ... When a man or a woman has a spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone. He has been granted a gift which amounts to a new state of consciousness and being. He has been set on a path which tells him he is really going somewhere, that life is not a dead end, not something to be endured or mastered. In a very real sense he has been transformed, because he has laid hold of a source of strength which, in one way or another, he had hitherto denied himself.”

“Using the inner resource I have discovered in A.A. as a higher power, I have been able to do the Steps just as they are written in the Big Book. I pray to this inner resource and ask to know what it would have me do and to give me the strength to do it. I carry this message to others. It works! I am experiencing a spiritual awakening and I feel all the promises coming true. I feel better inside than I have in years.

“I am now sponsoring several men and it is a wonderful feeling to see another alcoholic get sober. I am proof that it is possible to be an atheist on matters of the supernatural but still have a spiritual awakening and reap the rewards of the A.A. program of recovery.”

RATE THE PAMPHLET

What is your opinion?

What do you think of Many Paths to Spirituality?

Here's the rating question: **Will it help to make nonbelievers - both newcomers and current members - feel more welcome and comfortable in the rooms of AA?**

And these are your choices:

- 1 star -- seriously flawed - shows little or no understanding of agnostics and atheists in AA
- 2 stars - a beginning - but needs to be rewritten to better meet our needs
- 3 stars - average - but it can be improved
- 4 stars - very good - meets the needs of atheists and agnostics in AA
- 5 stars - perfect - no need for any changes whatsoever!

Your rating of this pamphlet will be shared with the 2015 General Service Conference. You can also share your comments at the bottom of this pamphlet. It is our expectation that this feedback will be appreciated by the General Service Conference, since our readers are the AA members for whom this literature was largely intended.

In order to rate the pamphlet you *must* click on *the star of your choice* below:

User Rating: 1.7 (100 votes)



Comments

Many Paths to Spirituality – 58 Comments

Les
on [August 17, 2014 at 1:51 pm](#) said:

Whatever use or support of the 12-Steps an individual AA member gives to that program it should be remembered that from their inception they were SUGGESTIONS. Therefore, a member who chooses to believe in a “higher power”(of any type)has no more credibility than an Atheist or Agnostic in becoming a sober alcoholic AA member. Personally, I have always believed that just four steps of the twelve steps, are all that are needed to achieve lasting sobriety... 1,4,8 and 12.

The pamphlet is simply self serving of the Deist hierarchy which belittles serious open-mindedness.

Vince H

on [August 17, 2014 at 1:10 pm](#) said:

I think most atheist members are missing the point. The pamphlet isn't for them but aimed at the mass membership to help them accept us in mainstream AA, that is to change mainstream AA into the inclusive organisation it was supposed to be all along. Just as black people were still downtrodden after the US civil war by denying them their right to register to vote, AA was always supposed to be non-religious and inclusive but Christians kept AA as their own enclave. Then since the 1960s a lot has been done to give black people full enfranchisement. That process seems to be starting now for atheists and agnostics in AA. I think it's a good first step in the right direction after 78 years and we need to build on it. One day the only requirement for membership will be alcoholism and we'll all get along famously.

Christopher G

on [August 17, 2014 at 11:17 am](#) said:

For starters I'd give the title, Many Paths to Spirituality, 5 stars. It certainly fit perfectly. But as a pamphlet directed to atheists, agnostics, or other free-thinkers, it would get 0 stars from me. I am currently collecting writings from "conference approved literature" to make our own group's pamphlet on the matter. It shall include the following, which we already use in our We Don't Know group's meeting format: "Alcoholics Anonymous does not demand that you believe anything. All of its twelve steps are but suggestions. The ONLY requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. Our membership ought to include ALL who suffer from alcoholism. Nor ought AA membership ever depend on money or Conformity. We are not allied with ANY particular faith, sect or denomination, nor do we oppose anyone. We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted. We have no desire to convince anyone that there is only one way by which faith can be acquired. Surprisingly enough, we find such convictions (agnostic/atheist) no great obstacle to a spiritual experience."

Alcoholics Anonymous, pg. 26, pp3.

Tradition 3 short form

From Tradition 3 long form

Big Book, Forward to First Edition, xiv.

There Is A Solution, pg. 28,9.

This is just the beginning. I intend to glean the truth from the chaff in AA literature to have available for the still suffering alcoholic, drinking or not, believing or not.

That being said, I abstain from the rating. We certainly don't need GSO's approval and I don't feel they need my rating. I do feel the grassroots movement is the key, the home group, the one on one, to change. We have reified literature because we have reified service structure. We may remain a minority, but so be it, if necessary.

bob_mcc

on [August 17, 2014 at 11:43 am](#) said:

Awesome stuff Christopher

I hope you will allow a downloadable PDF of this pamphlet. Or , that I may get a copy. More importantly, I wonder if you should post this on today's article. So more will see and read your work?

Tommy H
on [August 17, 2014 at 11:10 am](#) said:

Just another “Our way or the highway.”

Why am I not surprised?

Doug H.
on [August 16, 2014 at 8:07 pm](#) said:

I understand the difficulty in making a comment about the pamphlet without setting the fox among the chickens however if you pickup a copy of “Many Paths to Spirituality” you will discover an appeal to the level of intellect that makes what’s going on with television advertising look like a meeting of the Princeton Institute of Advanced Study. This “Sham-Wow” version of agnosticism in AA, is preposterous, trivial, insulting to the intelligence, and unworthy of publication. Many Paths to Spirituality’s attempt to equate agnosticism, atheism and free thinking to iridology, UFO hunting, mormonism (or some other form of institutionally supported foolishness), is so thinly veiled I am almost without speech. Unable to respond with the contempt this drek deserves let me say it is simply the cliff note edition of the chapter We Agnostics, only not written in 1939 yet with the same ends in mind. In just 13 short pages you heathens could be full fledged hand holdin’, psalm singing’, bible believing’, big book thumpin’ members of AA in good standing. Yes you can win sobriety, morality, perhaps even chastity, not to mention a shot at the big prize, that eternal AA meeting in the sky, seated next to the white you know who....or you could take the box next to where Carol is standing. But be careful it may be filled with nothing but fellowship and dreary old rational thinking ...let’s make a deal.

Evan Elpis

Wally K.
on [August 16, 2014 at 7:03 pm](#) said:

This pamphlet is worth less than a single star. GSO and the literature folks missed so badly with this one, it causes me to question the process and accountability involved in producing our literature. This would not have passed muster in 1940, or 34 years ago when it was requested, and certainly not in 2014 when it is so needed to help the non-religious newcomers and to tell the world that AA is a big tent organization that is tolerant and whose message is for all.

Edward
on [August 16, 2014 at 2:00 pm](#) said:

I have been in and out of AA here in England for 24 years. My longest period of continuous sobriety; 2 1/2 years. I have done the steps 3 times with 3 sponsors; 2 born-again Christians and an atheist who still insisted that I ‘fake it to make it.’ Sooner or later I would drink again, as I had been told I was

powerless, but I didn't believe that the higher power that I sought, would perform a 'miracle' for me. I am not powerless, just weak, I need to help and be helped by other alcoholics, I needed to change, and have done. Take god out of the steps, and they still work. The tragedy is the number of new-comers I have seen leave the rooms due to the god-pushers, and sometimes die. This pamphlet is no more than a rehash of the chapter to the agnostic; I would have given it zero.

Ric S.
on [August 16, 2014 at 9:16 am](#) said:

POORLY DONE. The pamphlet shows zero understanding of the needs of atheists/agnostics coming through the doors of AA. ONE STAR. IF THERE WAS A ZERO STAR RATING THAT WOULD BE MY CHOICE.

Neal
on [August 15, 2014 at 5:22 pm](#) said:

Here are some of the real stingers from the pamphlet guaranteed to upset skeptics:

Coming to believe in a higher power, however I defined it, seemed wholly impossible, and yet absolutely essential if I was to survive my disease...

...we began to realize the deep significance in the phrasing of A.A.'s Twelve Steps, which emphasize "a Power greater than ourselves," and "God, as we understand him.

Today I can even recite the Lord's Prayer without feeling guilty since it was pointed out to me in 'How it Works' that I have to go to any length to get and stay sober.

As expected, AA central has down played the objections driving non-believers out of recovery. The writers of the pamphlet ignore the primary problem and continue to offer as a higher power the 'Group of AA,' 'Good.Orderly.Direction,' doorknobs and the Sun. What they continue to evade is that none of these concepts can 'restore' us to sanity, 'care,' 'remove' defects, or have a 'will' as ordered in the steps. The invisible anthropomorphic deity is still expected to perform the tasks and we're expected to comply. Still no mention of determinism as a needed crutch for steps 2 and 3. Its basically more Chapter to the Agnostic "Believe that we believe or until you do too", ignoring revolutionary understanding in neurology, memplexes, and emotionality.

The pamphlet cleverly dodges the real grievances people leave over and deceptively describes an atmosphere of tolerance.

Many Paths to Spirituality is a joke that only severely distracted newcomers or downright simple people will fall for. I've already pre-ordered Sam Harris' new book [Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion](#) which I'm certain will rival my agnostic meeting in being a down to Earth life saver.

[9thousandfeet](#)
on [August 15, 2014 at 3:34 pm](#) said:

I was unhappy to be unable to give no stars at all. I was annoyed right from the start as a result of running smack-dab into this old and tired alibi;

A misconception about Alcoholics Anonymous is that it is a religious organization.

This is disingenuous nonsense.

First of all, there is no intellectually respectable way that a denial like this can be defended, and secondly that question is not nearly so important as whether most AA meetings contain scripted and significant religious behavior.

The answer to that last question is yes, almost every AA meeting involves the recitation of petitionary prayers, either at the beginning or the end of the meeting. Or sometimes both. Petitionary prayers, where the participant is asking a divinity for something (wisdom, patience, daily bread, whatever) are the very definition of religious conduct. While it's true that such prayers are often (not always) preceded by a statement such as "will those who wish to please join me in the Lord's Prayer (or whatever)", the way the whole thing is choreographed makes it difficult for any but the most emotionally secure to exclude themselves from "the circle".

So the people who crafted this pamphlet, as many here have already said, simply don't grasp what atheism or agnosticism actually are, nor do they have any real awareness of just how coercive the way which the believers behave can often be.

Ward Ewing, an Anglican priest and non-alcoholic AA trustee who is scheduled to be the keynote speaker at the WAFT conference (!), said in a speech accessible via the WAFT website that he "doesn't have the faith necessary to be an atheist". "Agnosticism", he says, he could perhaps manage, but not atheism.

This indicates that he thinks all atheists make the assertion that there is no god, which is simply untrue. Many make no assertions at all, but simply decline to believe the assertions of "believers".

If a religious professional cannot coherently unpack the nuances and diversity of where atheists and agnostics are actually coming from, and continue to approve literature which is so fundamentally dishonest, then there's not much hope for progress.

We're all talking past each other, it would seem.

CrescentDave

on [August 16, 2014 at 9:31 pm](#) said:

I am dismayed that anyone who posits a deep relationship with atheist/agnostic practitioners could possibly state he "doesn't have the faith necessary to be an atheist". This language expresses an abject lack of understanding of atheism and atheists. That he is the keynote speaker for WAFT is the sort of sorry irony none of us deserve. People around and in AA want to be able to take free license with words and redefine them to suit their agendas.

Here's what the American Atheists site has to say about such misappropriation of language: "Why should atheists allow theists to define who atheists are? Do other minorities allow the majority to define their character, views, and opinions? No, they do not. So why does everyone expect atheists to lie down and accept the definition placed upon them by the world's theists? Atheists will define themselves."

"Atheism is usually defined incorrectly as a belief system. Atheism is not a disbelief in gods or a denial of gods; it is a lack of belief in gods."

"Atheism is not a belief system nor is it a religion. While there are some religions that are atheistic (certain sects of Buddhism, for example), that does not mean that atheism is a religion. Two commonly used retorts to the nonsense that atheism is a religion are: 1) If atheism is a religion then bald is a hair color, and 2) If atheism is a religion then health is a disease."

Ward, you might be a nice man, but you don't respect real definitions by real atheists. Here's two more sources which you're obviously not familiar with:

The Oxford Dictionaries (American & English), define atheist as: “A person who disbelieves or lacks belief in the existence of God or gods.” The Oxford Dictionaries (American & English), define atheism as: “Disbelief or lack of belief in the existence of God or gods.”

One of the hallmark points of an atheist is the assertion a person cannot possibly prove the non-existence of something. And yet, we still have to endure the insultingly simple “explanations” theists dispense in order to make their points.

It’s infuriating that people who supposedly are so “concerned” about us haven’t taken the time to even understand how we (and the dictionaries of record) describe us.

Aric

on [August 15, 2014 at 12:13 am](#) said:

I gave it two stars. I can understand why many here give it one (or less) stars, I just didn’t have quite the (understandably) hostile reaction after reading it. That, I’d guess, is because it’s been probably around 10 years since I really gave a shit whether my non-belief in a personal, interventionist spirit was accepted by any of my fellow AAs.

Other commenters have covered it well, especially those describing it as a “kinder, gentler ‘We Agnostics.’” (And kudos to Stephanie – really outstanding comments & observations!) So, a few of my own random thoughts on the pamphlet:

The title alone made me skeptical. “Many Paths to Spirituality”?! That’s supposed to ‘comfort’ the agnostic/atheist alcoholic? Did I first come to an AA meeting to find ‘spirituality’, or to quit drinking? Why not “The Many Paths to Sobriety” – and actually include the perspective of at least one non-believing member?

Considering it’s purpose is supposedly to recognize the validity of agnostic / atheist members’ participation in AA, there is surprisingly little information on what it is like to be a sober, non-believing member of AA. We get a Native American perspective, a touch of Jewish thought, some Bhuddism-lite, and a good amount of AA’s usual “spiritual but not religious” routine (i.e. ‘Caffeine-Free Diet Religion’). The pamphlet left me thinking there has been no evolution in thought in AA, generally speaking, in the many decades since the sneering debut of the “We Agnostics” chapter of the big book. That’s a shame. Would the faith of AA’s majority of believers be hurt somehow by including the honest perspective of actual non-believers? Again, I’m asking myself what the main point of this whole thing is – drunks talking to other drunks and helping each other stay off the sauce, or the promotion of a semi-cultish, fuzzily-defined “spirituality?” (“If you want to get sober & stay sober you have to find god or YOU WILL DIE!!! – but don’t worry, he loves you & wants you to stay sober & anyway, your higher power can be anything you want – a doorknob, a pebble on the ground, or, heck, even the vengeful god of the old testament! Whatever!! 1!)

Finally, I don’t see what’s written in the pamphlet as hostility towards non-believing members of AA. It made me feel that whoever wrote it was at least *sort of* trying to embrace us, but maybe this is the best they can do. Maybe, in the same way I just don’t have it in me to truly believe in and pray to an idea if a personal god, the ‘powers-that-be’ in AA just don’t have it in them to truly believe that a good number of their fellow AAs *don’t* believe.

larry k

on [August 14, 2014 at 10:40 pm](#) said:

So true, which behooves aa to amend it's statements or remain without integrity. Not a very good power of example.

But what do you expect from a group of drunks who are encouraged to be part of a selfish program? I don't expect many to recover...and they don't using half measures. they may never drink, but that alone is not my idea of recovery...IMO.

Donna M.
on [August 14, 2014 at 7:06 pm](#) said:

I meant to give two stars but I think only one came up. This text is well intentioned but it doesn't fill the Bill (pun intended). In reading all the gracious comments from the atheists and agnostics, it seems that we "nones" are always the ones who have to make the warm adjustments. I have been cursed out, told I would go to hell and otherwise admonished by the religious who sometimes attend our agnostic AA meetings but have never said or heard anyone in those agnostic meetings ever treat a believer in this ugly way. Those who take the "higher power ground" always have the advantage. And that is the subtext here.

Daniel C.
on [August 14, 2014 at 10:14 am](#) said:

This piece of rubbish deserves no stars.
I knew the day I heard that they were finally approving the pamphlet that it would be transparent and this ignorant to Agnostics and Atheists.
If I were new and suffering, this pamphlet would do nothing to make me feel welcome.
It is merely the "Chapter to the Agnostics" with the transparent text telling me I will eventually come to believe.
Ironically I find it immediately goes against the fantastic text that starts the pamphlet by Bill W. At our home group meeting, I brought up to our members that they are finally printing a pamphlet for Agnostics and Atheists. I was greeted back by some with "What's it called? How to go to hell Sober?" And these are friends.
But I am one happy non believing sober member of AA.
Seems "God" had different paths for most of the others. And they are on his team.

crescentdave
on [August 14, 2014 at 1:39 am](#) said:

I have nothing but contempt for the editors of a pamphlet that includes the following statement in a publication meant to support the idea of diversity (Many Paths to Spirituality):

Today I can even recite the Lord's Prayer without feeling guilty since it was pointed out to me in 'How it Works' that I have to go to any length to get and stay sober.

Yes, I am sure it was pointed out to him. What a shame. What a loathsome act of manipulation. What a terrible example to be "sharing" as an example of inclusiveness.

crescentdave
on [August 14, 2014 at 1:07 am](#) said:

As has already been pointed out there is a reason why this pamphlet was written. An inclusive program would have no need. But AA began as a Christian based program of recovery and the organization both formally and informally hews to the original wording and conceptualizations. I was going to give a punch list of objections, but it seems clear to me if it can't get its facts right in the first paragraph, it's unnecessary to cite the myriad further misstatements and mischaracterizations. It falls apart before it can even begin.

The pamphlet is erroneous at best and dishonest at worst when it attempts to describe AA as a non-religious organization.

Three separate U.S. District Courts have affirmed 2 separate State Supreme Court rulings that AA is religious. The Inouye v. Kemna 2007 case, heard in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, made this statement: "In this case, it is essentially uncontested that requiring a parolee to attend religion-based treatment programs violates the First Amendment." The programs referenced were AA/NA. Here is their second major point: "The vastly overwhelming weight of authority on the precise question in this case held at the time of Nanamori's actions that coercing participation in programs of this kind is unconstitutional." The programs that are illegal to force a person to attend are religious in nature. It was illegal to force someone to attend AA/NA and that was well established in the court's eye and in the court's reading of jurisprudence.

Lots of words that boil down to one central fact: legally, AA is considered to be religious. Period. The court was so clear on this summary of relevant case material relating to the issue, that it ruled a person could sue the office or officer who attempted to legally force him or her to attend AA/NA.

AA has made it an article of faith that it is "spiritual, not religious," but simply saying so doesn't mean it is so. AA can insist on having its own opinion, but it cannot insist on creating its own "facts."

Glenna R.
on [August 13, 2014 at 10:25 pm](#) said:

Unlike so many, I would like to say that the style and structure of this pamphlet is terrible; I can hear Bill Wilson rolling over in his grave. It is incoherent and fragmentary. The GSO needs to find some people who know how to write good English. It is filled with platitudes and half-truths without any organisation. I had forgotten that pamphlets were so poorly written if it is true that this is the same tone or style of other Pamphlets?

I just finished reading that Bill Wilson wrote in the Grapevine in 1946:

So long as there is the slightest interest in sobriety, the most unmoral, the most anti-social, the most critical alcoholic may gather about him a few kindred spirits and announce to us that a new Alcoholics Anonymous Group has been formed. Anti-God, anti-medicine, anti-our recovery program, even anti-each other-these rampant individuals are still an A.A. Group if they think so!

It is A.A. that should be tolerant not me or my group; therefore, I have difficulty accepting that various Intergroups have the power or the principles to debar atheist/agnostic/non-believers groups.

When Appendix II is cited, I wish everyone would quote the whole of it. The line I quoted to my religious but very accepting sponsor as I was about to join a group that accepted everyone without exception is that some of our more RELIGIOUS MEMBERS call this Higher Power God. To me, that says it all and she agreed. To call your higher power God makes you religious. End of point. I say religious and not spiritual which is a demonized word to placate so many people when so many who use the word are religious more than spiritual in the inclusive sense that A. A.'s like to use the word spiritual.

I give this pamphlet 1 star. I can't see the point in arguing about that, yet I was not surprised by this disjointed diatribe as I have learned to expect very little from A.A. as a whole.

Laura M.
on [August 14, 2014 at 1:45 am](#) said:

While the authors of the pamphlet have made an attempt to mention atheists and agnostics, the writing does not represent the practices or beliefs of most agnostics I know in AA. I don't understand why you did not ask some real atheists or agnostics to provide input or use quotes from us! We do exist, and you seem to be missing the boat.

Specifically, the mention of prayer is misleading. Most of us do not pray. We are not relieved that you encourage us to use the term "higher power of our own understanding" because many do not believe there is intervening "higher power" that helps us find serenity. For many years, I mouthed the words to the Lord's prayer feeling like a total hypocrite (commonly recited at 95% of the meetings in Tucson, AZ where we have over 400 meetings each week). As I listened to others thank and make appeals to what appeared to me as a Santa Claus, the male pronoun for "father" drove me further and further into resentment at AA, a group that states it is not "religious," and yet supports several Christian beliefs in its "unbiased" literature.

This appears to be a good pamphlet for people of OTHER faiths, you are still insinuating that admitted agnostics and atheists are "lacking" (ie. missing the boat) and if we are lucky, we will eventually "find God." something that many do not want believe, an idea that is not even worth thinking about. There are hundreds of AA agnostics that do fine staying sober, using an agnostic version of the steps without relapse. Without "god," we stay sober just fine. I don't use the steps as written in Alcoholics Anonymous; I use the "agnostic" version and am true to myself.

Thanks for reading my comment,
Laura M.

bob_mcc
on [August 14, 2014 at 1:12 pm](#) said:

Hi Glenna.

When the "more religious members" infer or call us ogres tell them "with out us you can't have prOGRESSs."

marnin m
on [August 13, 2014 at 10:21 pm](#) said:

To me the most spiritual statement that can be made is "am going to die if I continue on this path!"
- "I want to live" !

If this pamphlet is intended for a non believing newcomer to AA I feel it is way too complex and I would not be reassured that it is for me.

If for someone with established agnostic sobriety it is just ok.

On the occasions when I spoke at hospitals in NY I called my talk the “miranda act” of AA. I spoke about what you had to do and what was entirely optional.

Many patients thought this approach was a breath of fresh air.

Sorry I can not be more enthusiastic about the proposed pamphlet.

Marnin M

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Ann M.

on [August 13, 2014 at 7:02 pm](#) said:

It completely ignores the experience of those of us who after years of sobriety, (39 in my case) still remain atheist or agnostic.

Alfred W.

on [August 13, 2014 at 6:47 pm](#) said:

On a historical note, I was asked more than 2 decades ago to ‘write up a little something’ for my GSR to take to the committee, which was considering it at the time, and which I did (if I recall, it was within whatever word limit they mentioned back then). I did the same thing about 3 years ago, which (I was told) was submitted directly to the committee by the person I’d given it to. This last one was quite a bit less than 800 words, and it was specifically mentioned for me to write ‘from a non-believer’s perspective’. I do recall emailing it to GSO as well, a couple years ago, on my own.

I never heard anything back from either submission, nor did I read anything in the final draft that mentioned anything I said. This final result has nothing to do with what I understood to be the committee’s stated goal.

The title itself - mentioning ‘spiritual’ paths - divorces it from what I (apparently mistakenly) understood to be it’s purpose. A pamphlet that simply expands WHICH religious/faith-based religions can be used is of little use to non-believers.

I’m quite sure a document from GSO/AA - any document - which specifically mentions that belief in God/gods/interventionist Higher Powers is not required will never be published in any form, for how could they admit such a thing?

If AA were to state - in any manner, shape, or form - that an interventionist HP is not required to get or stay sober, it would potentially invalidate the belief systems of 100’s of thousands, even millions of AA members. They would be in the same spot as a typical xian believer who confronts the fact that their belief in God - and everything they’ve ever done in life based on it - is probably based on illusionary thinking.

I stopped expecting any such thing from within AA - it’s too painful, or shocking, for most believers to ‘allow’ themselves to consider. I would be truly shocked if such a thing ever came to pass - which is why I started my own smart-based recovery meeting.

Just my own 2 cents.

John L.
on [August 13, 2014 at 4:53 pm](#) said:

p.s. I rate MPS one star. I tried clicking on 1 star, but nothing seemed to happen.

Roger
on [August 13, 2014 at 5:31 pm](#) said:

I think it worked, John. It went from 45 to 46 user ratings just around the time of your comment.

Ed S.
on [August 13, 2014 at 4:33 pm](#) said:

I worried when I read the first sentence of the second paragraph which states, “A misconception about Alcoholics Anonymous is that it is a religious organization.” Five courts have decided that it is a religion and therefore unconstitutional for a court to force people to attend AA. I agree with what everyone has said about this pamphlet. I suggest everyone buy, [Don’t Tell](#) Edited by Roger C., which contains real stories by agnostics and atheists in AA.

Inclusion
on [August 13, 2014 at 3:52 pm](#) said:

I agree with this from aa agnostics. AAs new pamphlet misses the mark for those of us that do not believe in an anthropomorphic mystical GOD but do believe in spiritual practices informed by logical science and rational deliberation. That there are things that none of us understand, but though I can or cannot believe that there is some “power” greater than us in the universe responsible for us being here and giving the universe chaotic order (at least as we understand it this far) should not preclude me from gaining and be supported explicitly in my program-whether my belief system is based on an anthropomorphic belief (faith) in a divine diety or not. I am not looking to deny the rights or access of those that do, but rather seeking inclusion in and space in the center of the recovery community in which to continue to grow in my life and recovery and be of maximum service to humanity-re of race, religion, creed, or socio-economic standing. I am tired of feeling marginalized-and either AA is going to recognize us-the mainstream-or they are going to lose us, a significant portion of its membership as we go elsewhere to create our own community or communities of support.

sean
on [August 13, 2014 at 3:32 pm](#) said:

No mark lower than 1? Zero isn't low enough.

Robin R.
on [August 13, 2014 at 2:05 pm](#) said:

Rated at a -1. I am extremely disappointed with this pamphlet, especially when you consider it took 40 years to get to this point. My read is that it is simply a fumbling attempt to justify the 4th chapter of the Big Book. I seriously doubt that a single true agnostic/atheist had any input to this effort. The only credible portion is the opening paragraph, written by Bill almost 50 years ago. It was my impression that this pamphlet was intended to assist a newcomer with “No God” to realize that he/she was entirely welcome in the AA community and was not expected to eventually adopt the “God” beliefs of the existing members. This effort failed miserably and will likely cause even more confusion and skepticism for the nonbeliever when they finally reach out for help.

John L.
on [August 13, 2014 at 1:51 pm](#) said:

Was this really intended for nonbelievers in A.A.? It is entirely wrong, beginning with the title: “Many Paths to Spirituality” (MPS). The word “spirituality” is not a positive one for us atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, rationalists, secular humanists, and other nonbelievers. We are committed to Realism – to the reasoned use of evidence from the real world. We take a dim view of “faith”, “belief”, and “spirituality. The words “spiritual” or “spirituality” are used no fewer than 32 times in MPS. The word “reason” is not used even once.

On the whole, MPS is little better than Bill W.’s loathsome Chapter 4 (“To the Agnostic”). The impression is given that we non-believers are merely following a “different spiritual path”, that our atheism or agnosticism can co-exist with “spirituality”. No. When we reject religion, we reject superstition and dogma. We reject muddled, fuzzy, mystical thinking in favor of a clear-headed orientation to the real world. Nowhere in MPS is a nonbeliever allowed to make the case against religion.

Although nonbelievers have been treated as second-class members of A.A., the intellectual and moral high ground belongs to us. Nearly a century of sociological studies have shown that nonbelievers are better educated, more intelligent, and more law-abiding than religionists.

MPS ends by printing Bill W.’s 12 Steps, exactly as he wrote them. This religious claptrap gets the final word in a work originally intended for those of us who are above religion. Yes, I mean that – above religion.

Neal
on [August 14, 2014 at 12:00 pm](#) said:

Great post. You’re exactly right too, the moral high ground belongs to us and always has. Sam Harris cites studies that confirm what we already know; that violence and poverty flourish in religious nations and religious states.

What did we expect this long awaited pamphlet to look like? I’m laughing guys. Did you really think big old Christian AA was going to “amend” the lunacy or go on justifying unreasonable beliefs through double talk and diversion? To give us what we want, they have to scrub chapter 4 and half of steps so just be glad we don’t drink and lose the fantastic expectations. We’re dealing with anthropomorphic delusion itself which has been instinctive to primates for likely a million years.

Lance B
on [August 13, 2014 at 1:09 pm](#) said:

As I read the comment and then the pamphlet, I had an insight which had not occurred to me previously. I wrote it down like this: Perhaps many (most) Americans need the concept of GOD in order to understand humility with respect to something. That lets them continue to feel superior to others who do not have the same idea that a supernatural being considers them so special that it will give them direction and intervene in their lives to make those lives fair or superior to others (the opposite of humility).

So we see most AA's feeling confident that they "are on to something wonderful and special to them" which keeps them sober because they are special, but in recompense or gratitude they must grovel before that supernatural power."

life-j
on [August 13, 2014 at 1:08 pm](#) said:

In all fairness the original literature committee from 3-4 years ago was really trying to make what we were looking for. Please see my post under chris' review. what is not fair however, is that since the members of that committee were rotated out little by little as is common procedure, the god people made sure to get in there, and take control of the project, and get it watered down to their level. I think we ought to make an investigation, and unravel just how it went down.

Lon McC
on [August 13, 2014 at 12:59 pm](#) said:

An apparent desire to appease atheists and agnostics is the only merit I can award to the writers of the pamphlet. They seriously failed. The content is so thoroughly flawed that it may well be a liability for AA groups to offer this to non-believers in the hope that the latter will see the light, and use its message to "keep coming back" to meetings. The well-informed atheistic student of life, who has been hooked by alcoholism, first enters the doors of AA hoping to find relief for his alcoholism. AA leaders who have found a higher power of any variety almost invariably cannot understand that the atheist sees himself as the informed individual, free of any sometimes deleterious unproved or disproved religious dogma. He further sees those who have fundamentalist religious convictions or beliefs about the supernatural as the indoctrinated ones who tend to dismiss well supported evidence-based facts, if they conflict with their unsupported religious convictions. No matter how critical it may seem to the believer, God, god, gods or any variety of higher power is not an option for the atheist. The success of AA for the alcoholic atheist lies in participating in the fellowship of people who sincerely care about their suffering fellow humans ... a true fellowship. When our leaders in AA eventually learn that non-believers are real, are likely to be well-informed, are not "spiritually deficient," and have a very real world desire to find sobriety and get back to the business of living, then maybe they can muster a deeply self-honest desire to greet the newcomer atheist/alcoholic at the door on equal footing, and with a heart-felt, "Hi, I'm 'X' and I'm an alcoholic. Welcome home."

Faye
on [August 13, 2014 at 12:55 pm](#) said:

I agree with Chris and I find this pamphlet extremely disappointing. One of its main purposes seems to be to justify “God” and “Higher Power” language in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. It is a waste of time and paper as it tries to show how far AA has come in is ‘inclusive language’ and “inclusive meetings.” I would love to know more about the person or group who put this together and their intended purpose. The less that I have to read and hear about “God” and “Higher Power”, the happier I will be.

As a very disgruntled agnostic/atheist / freethinker, who is firmly entrenched in the AA program, I would not share this pamphlet with anyone who questions God and Higher Power. I am grateful to those of you who continue to work at sharing our stories and experiences, so that we can find what is meaningful and true in our lives. I like my sobriety, without God, praying, and higher powers.

bob_mcc
on [August 13, 2014 at 12:43 pm](#) said:

Ok I refuse to rate this pamphlet by the rating question. This is just as bad and controlling as We agnostics. Need I say more?

The pamphlet does a great job of illustrating that there are many paths to spirituality. Uses many different examples to make it appealing to as many as possible; and I would be self centered and self serving to view it in the context that it is all about me: the atheist/agnostic, free thinker. We are the growing minority but still a minority.

Harm by AA has been done to “non-believers”. Or one step further is “un-believers” used by Dick B. on this website? The underlying tones of un-believer and the tradition of killing the heretic for his thoughts is carried forward into AA and its “non believer.” They do not get it. If AA is based on a program of recovery including restitution then the denial is obvious and the lack of virtue is awful. Some other prejudiced issues from AA’s past were women and LGBT native and black. Do they have pamphlets? Why were they mad; to make amends or to allow more to come thru the doors?

I feel at this point our atheist/agnostic pamphlet will only come by way of a human rights lawsuit or more likely the threat of one. Maybe then AA as a whole will open their eyes to the inventory needed on this issue and see that action is necessary. After 40 years and the changing of the pamphlet from atheists/agnostics to many pathways to spirituality should be obvious we are wasting our time working within. If the Nones continue to grow then in a generation or two it may change by demographics. But, how many in the mean time will walk away?

Please lets not tunnel information as I believe that erodes what Atheist/Agnostics represent. If I was to rate this after one reading I would say that it is a great pamphlet which only includes Atheist/Agnostics as a small part of there target. It is not about us nor does it address our issues.

John F
on [August 13, 2014 at 12:18 pm](#) said:

God is optional. I do not need a personal god to get through life. So far, I am doing okay with the help of my friends. I am not waiting for the miracle to happen; instead, I am living life one day at a time. Sadly the new pamphlet completely ignores me.

N.G.
on [August 13, 2014 at 12:06 pm](#) said:

It is a start, I guess. But it also makes me feel like slime if this is supposed to be the voice of my community; secular AA members. On the one hand I am happy that they recognize that there is an issue. On the other hand the method of dealing with the issue is pure whitewash. I gave it two stars because I am genuinely trying to practice love & tolerance.

Camille
on [August 13, 2014 at 11:53 am](#) said:

Zero stars.

Terribly disappointing and yet another attempt to let us nonbeliever's know just how silly AA thinks we are. Wow. I am voting with my feet on this one and giving AA a much needed rest after 25 years of listening to God-centric recovery.

MarkInT.
on [August 13, 2014 at 11:45 am](#) said:

“Will it help to make nonbelievers - both newcomers and current members - feel more welcome and comfortable in the rooms of AA?”

One star. I'd give it a Zero if I could. The pamphlet is yet another EVASION and DENIAL of facts on the ground for legions of nonbelievers who are in AA, specifically agnostics and atheists.

Once I heard what the title was going to be, I began to be highly skeptical of the outcome. My skepticism was based on AA's “history” concerning this issue. The pamphlet now published only supports that initial skepticism. In many ways, the pamphlet adds insult to injury.

We nonbelievers will have to continue to wait for something from GSO that in fact addresses the all too common facts on the ground for us who attend, and do love the Fellowship of AA.

My guess is that hell will freeze over before such “can” happen. 😊

Kari
on [August 13, 2014 at 11:28 am](#) said:

I tried. To give a one star rating but it didn't register. I think that believers cannot begin to understand how anyone could not eventually become one. I don't think that this pamphlet will fill the need that led to its production.

Michelle
on [August 13, 2014 at 10:13 am](#) said:

Sorry I am unable to rate this; I see no stars. I barely give it a 1.

Pat N.
on [August 12, 2014 at 7:25 pm](#) said:

For 70+ years, AA has needed a pamphlet addressing the issues of alcoholic atheists and agnostic. It still does.

This pamphlet sort of addresses the needs of nondeists, but only in the context of other nonChristians. It does a shabby job of addressing the concerns of those of us who do not accept the idea of supernatural, personal, probably male God. This is consistent with the constant reference to "God" in all AA literature.

Three of the quotations from AA's concept of "nonbelievers" include a Roman Catholic, a practicing Jew, and a Native American believer in a Great Spirit. Aside from our sobriety, what do I, an atheist, have in common with them? Only that we lack the fundamentalist/evangelical Christian viewpoint from which the BB and the 12+12 were written. One of those quoted said s/he didn't care if I worship Allah, Jahweh, Buddha(!), etc. What about those of us who worship nothing.

I suspect this was written by a goodhearted staffer who is neither atheist nor agnostic, advised by a committee composed of believers and nonbelievers. Why couldn't it have been written by a team of atheists/agnostics with longterm sobriety in AA? (Unlikely, since Bill W. didn't have the 4th chapter written by an agnostic, nor the ones to wives and families written by Al-Anon members.) There could be a separate pamphlet writer for nonChristian deists.

I fear this was written to reduce pressure from atheists and agnostics. I hope it doesn't work, and that we continue to push for an appropriate pamphlet, which I suspect we will have to develop ourselves. We obviously can't rely on the Conference or GSO to do it. I can't imagine a young alcoholic being moved by this thing, written in the usual stuffy middleaged, middle class manner so dear to AA.

Andy R.
on [August 13, 2014 at 12:01 pm](#) said:

Excellent points, Pat! So clueless it almost seems like a setup of a joke ("A Catholic, a Native American and an Atheist walk into a meeting"...don't know how it ends, maybe we are told to sit with the Chosen People!) Patronizing and irrelevant - with the likely outcome of turning more non-believers off about AA. Being included in the "all other" category with a message that will be tolerated no matter who we worship (again, clueless about the very definition of atheist).

Not surprised but the good news is...who reads pamphlets? Let's keep posting intelligently on this excellent site (thanks Roger and all involved!) and start our own meetings. We're growing in

Dallas - the heart of the Bible noose - and as alternative godless groups continue to grow, we'll help AA be saved from itself. <http://www.weagnosticsdfw.org>

Neil F
on [August 12, 2014 at 6:55 pm](#) said:

One Star.

The pamphlet as written does not speak to me. It seems to be just another attempt to convince me that the recovery process as detailed in the Twelve Steps is just fine and if I have any problem with personal prayer, the Lord's Prayer at meetings or a Higher Power that evolves into a personal god that sounds much like the Christian God, then the problem is really with me and my ability to be honest, open and willing.

The pamphlet does nothing to let newcomers as well as long timers know that Atheists and Agnostics have been getting sober, remaining sober and having good long term sobriety since the very early days of AA.

I will read the pamphlet several more times over the next few days and think about what it seems to be saying. Once I have done so, I will try to collect my thoughts and provide more input. Who knows, additional time and thought may bring me to different conclusions.

JP
on [August 12, 2014 at 5:45 pm](#) said:

2 stars

As said in previous post, it feel like the same old rhetoric . "and you will eventually call him God" especially with the inclusion of this sentence "But I knew that the days I prayed seemed to go better than the days I didn't..."

Also the paragraph in the section Many Paths to Spirituality that reads at the end "I had discovered a quiet, inner voice - a God within."

I have discovered a quiet inner voice too but it is not a God, It is ME. MY consciousness.

They are pandering in my opinion.

There seems to be an overall philosophy that everyone that is in AA currently believes that agnostics/atheists/ and free thinkers are excepted and that is simply not the case.

JHG
on [August 12, 2014 at 5:31 pm](#) said:

My gut-level experience of the content was that it was worse than uninviting. There is just something about the tone that puts me off. I could analyze that, but mainly I want to report that that was my initial and enduring emotional reaction.

I agree with Life that this is “a kinder, gentler ‘Chapter 4.’” That is not the main thing that I hear and certainly not the only message that comes through, but it is there nonetheless.

It gets off to a bad start. Immediately after the opening Bill W quote, there is this:

“A misconception about Alcoholics Anonymous is that it is a religious organization. Since A.A. groups often rent space in churches, attending an A.A. meeting in a church basement can reinforce that impression, and the possibility of hearing a prayer at the end of a meeting can further cement the idea for some.”

There are several things about this that are outright disingenuous and insulting. There is more than “the possibility of hearing a prayer at the end of the meeting;” there is a near certainty. Hearing not only a prayer, but usually The Lord’s Prayer, doesn’t just “cement the idea;” it cinches it. The idea that AA is a religious organization is not a “misconception.” If something looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it is a duck.

The bulk of the pamphlet is doing at least one of the following:

- Defending AA
- Justifying the fact that there is so much about God in AA
- Promoting AA
- Promoting the idea of getting some sort of a higher power
- Spinning the facts

By the same token, I don’t think it is completely without merit. It’s worse than unhelpful for most atheists and agnostics (it’s outright alienating), but it might be helpful to some.

I give it somewhere between a C-minus and a D (two stars).

Stephanie
on [August 12, 2014 at 5:35 pm](#) said:

I hear you about the tone. The effect to me is creepy and vaguely alarming.

life-j
on [August 12, 2014 at 5:22 pm](#) said:

One star.

Do I really have to give it a whole star?

This is nothing but a kinder, gentler “Chapter 4”, which again, is nothing but an insult to non-believers. That we all eventually find our higher power - the option of not having one, to simply be helped by other alcoholics in recovery without anything “higher” materializing anywhere as a result of that process, is not really ever considered. This is not many paths to spirituality, but many paths to a higher power.

Spirituality as a simple prescription for life such as honesty, openmindedness, willingness, humility, service, and living by the golden rule, without any higher power stuff is never considered, they still do what they can to muddle any distinction between religion and spirituality.

That this shitty little pamphlet (and yes, let us keep that precise wording) should be the end result of several years of work, and many people sending in stories - where most presumably, were of the non-believing variety - by hopeful people that finally our recovery would get some recognition, and to see how the editors of this pamphlet have been willing to go to any length to keep everything exactly as it is, is really a greater insult than if they had never made this pamphlet.

Further, I had expected a book, something a bit akin to the Grapevine book “Spiritual Awakenings” - which really is a pretty decent little book, it has not just a couple of token stories by non-believers

like “Came to believe” does, but quite a few - only I had been looking forward to seeing a book which went farther, had primarily stories from non-believers with perhaps a few stories from openminded believers or doubters thrown in.

But the editors of this pamphlet can not even rise to the level of The Grapevine.

Shame on them for kowtowing to the religious majority one more time instead of just walking away, so we’d know where we stand, instead of looking forward to this, well, looking forward a little anyway. We had heard it was being barbered down somewhat, but hadn’t heard it was being barbered down to nothing, absolutely nothing but one more insult.

OK, I’m starting to repeat myself, I’ll stop, I’m just so steaming mad about this. I was to the point of gagging as I read it, could barely finish it, it was so revolting. Thank god it wasn’t longer.

Larry K

on [August 12, 2014 at 5:00 pm](#) said:

Let me first say, I am delighted that after some forty years of trying, a pamphlet has been produced that addresses a few of the issues that some non-Christians have with alcoholics anonymous.

I will also say that the pamphlet manages to reach the same tone that is written in most all other pamphlets. It is a consistent style and voice that assures this reader that indeed it has come from GSO.

I would say it is a glorious example of a half measure.

Why is a pamphlet necessary? Is it necessary to hand one to a non-Christian newcomer?

Yes, but it shouldn’t be.

AA is not to have a sectarian opinion and if it is necessary to address a non-believer’s issues...then it is evident that the group that is being attended is displaying a sectarian opinion or slant. There are meetings where there is no need. There are many where there is great need...and that is too bad indeed.

This pamphlet should be directed at current membership...and indeed it is, but without the clear message that two thirds of the world are not Christian and they belong in AA if they say they do... with no ifs, ands, or buts, about it.

Sadly, this pamphlet actually furthers some of the misconceptions or mythologies that exist today in the fellowship. I will address some of them directly.

“By incorporating basic Buddhist practices with my A.A. practices - regular meetings, doing service, working with newcomers, living the Steps and reading A.A. literature - I have discovered an awesome way to improve my conscious contact with the God of my understanding and live life on life’s terms in relative serenity. I still have anxieties, anger and all the rest of the emotions that come with life, but, bit by bit, I am able to manage them.”

Buddhists do not believe in God, so this statement, while perhaps an accurate quote, is not reasonable. It is a dishonest reflection of Buddhism. It is disrespectful to a large community of individuals...many of which could use our help. This is not the way to do that.

“It took me a long time to separate Judaism from alcoholism, to accept that spirituality did not affect or change my religious beliefs, but enhanced them, that my Higher Power was not the same as yours, that praying and the posture I use to pray does not alter my Jewishness but is necessary for my recovery. Today I can even recite the Lord’s Prayer without feeling guilty since it was pointed out to me in ‘How it Works’ that I have to go to any length to get and stay sober.”

I don’t know where to begin with this...Matthew 6:5 to 6:9 The Lord’s Prayer:

5“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. 7““And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8““So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. 9“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name....”

Some versions just quote Jesus with...”be not like the heathens”...but I digress.

There are many faiths that still consider the public recitation of the Lord’s Prayer a blasphemy. Privacy in matters of faith are sacrosanct, inviolable, sacred. Members of these faiths will not join in such a practice...indeed, in my faith, I have never experienced a recitation of this prayer during a worship service. But...that is a sectarian difference and I choose not to recite it just as the old timers in my home groups chose to step back out of the circle and remain silent. It would be just as wrong to criticize this public recitation of the Lords Prayer as it is to belie it’s sentiment by saying it in public.

“Going to any lengths to stay sober”...the justification for reciting this Christian prayer. I think not, if you are a person who deeply holds the full intended meaning of the sermon on the mount. Not abiding by Jesus’ words is a blasphemy and/or...just plain bad policy.

The fact that it is mentioned in this brochure infers it’s acceptance by AA members. It is not accepted by all of them...nor is it a requirement. This brochure seems to flip that perspective around with this line.

“My sponsor was well versed in A.A.s Twelve Steps, Traditions and Concepts. He had a substantial service history and talked to me about the 36 principles upon which A.A. was founded. It is these principles that I would ultimately turn my life and my will over to.”

Again...this is a serious vaguery. Sometime someone should list the 36 principles, but make it 72 so that everything is covered. The core principle needed to get sober is not drinking.

In the first brochure Titled Mr X and Alcoholics Anonymous produced in Cleveland in 1939 there were four principles.

1. The principle of spiritual dependence
2. The principle of universality
3. The principle of mutual aid
4. The principle of transformation

Principles are the foundations upon which we can build. Who can either recite let alone live by 36 principles...talk about complicating things. Talk about starting or re-enforcing an idea that is plucked from the “Liturgy” of AA. Now that GSO has said it...it is infallible. Let’s hope not.

“In reading Appendix II in the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, I have come to understand the profound changes that come from spirituality. The appendix says, ‘With few exceptions our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves. Most of us think this awareness ... is the essence of spiritual experience.’”

I like this...and I like the fact that the end of the passage was not quoted...

“There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments, and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance—that principle is contempt prior to investigation.

— Herbert Spencer -”

Actually....quoted by William Paley

The Works of William Paley, D.D. Archdeacon of Carlisle; containing His Life, Moral and Political Philosophy, Evidences of Christianity, Natural Theology, Tracts, Horae Paulinae, Clergyman's Companion, and Sermons. Printed verbatim from the original editions. Complete in one volume. New Edition. Philadelphia: Crissy & Markley, 1850. Page 372.

Perhaps AA can vote to change the quote so that they end this misquote...it is supposed to be an honest program.

Herbert Spencer said "Those who cavalierly reject the Theory of Evolution as not being adequately supported by facts seem to forget that their own theory is supported by no facts at all."

and

"How often misused words generate misleading thoughts!"

I am hoping that one day some one can provide me with a single example of a person turning their will over with out it resulting in death. The will to live is our deepest attribute...

I hope the brochure is effective at tempering the fervor with which some AA members have chosen in their path of transformation.

Finally...and not supported by a quote, because it was left completely out.

There is no mention of apostates nor those of us who have suffered mightily at the hands of religious institutions and organizations of all persuasion. No mention of those children who have been abused in the name of God for their mistakes and missteps or for their general difference to the belief or will of the authority. Those members who have developed a "peanut" allergy to God.

To many of these alcoholics, God of their understanding makes those zealous members of ours nothing less than evil incarnate.

I will give it 2 stars... because it is just short of a half measure... and I am hoping it doesn't avail us nothing.

Stephanie
on [August 12, 2014 at 4:55 pm](#) said:

I concur that it is basically a kinder, gentler rehash of We Agnostics, an exercise in AA apologetics, and as absurdly dogmatic as its precursor. It's not an attempt to help non-believers nor make space for non-believers.

If I could give it zero stars I would, because it effectively tells Jews that if they won't pray like Christians they aren't fully committed to their recovery. That is, on its face, anti-Semitic, and absolutely outrageous. And it says to me that the GSO has adopted the dangerous interpretation of "any lengths" that is favoured by big book fundamentalists and the cults formed within and from AA.

The GSO is clearly still mired in clueless Christian majoritarianism, and it simply does not understand that this nonsense fundamentally disrespects the other religious and spiritual traditions it claims AA accommodates. All spiritual paths are fine, except when they conflict with Christian-infused AA dogma, and then AA dogma must prevail or one is not sufficiently committed to recovery.

It also strikes me that this pamphlet effectively, though inadvertently, supports the contention that AA is a religion. It endorses a comment that "religion means being committed to a practice of belief," and then endorses the practice of the steps as *the* route to spiritual awakening, an external power greater than one's self, and recovery.

Finally, given that I don't work the steps and don't conceptualize power other than myself as a "higher power", this pamphlet says to me that the GSO believes I do not belong in AA.

Fail. One star.

Ann M.
on [August 11, 2014 at 10:05 pm](#) said:

I give it 3 stars. It still seems to be insisting that one HAS to have a Higher Power, and there are probably lots who don't. I do use the 12 step program itself as an HP, but I know at least one other who balks at the idea of any kind of HP, and I don't see that as being addressed.

Jaye
on [August 11, 2014 at 9:08 pm](#) said:

3 stars.

Much of the pamphlet doesn't speak *for* me, but I would guess that it does express the opinion of some agnostics. I'm keeping in mind how careful they had to be to write this without making any reference to the existing literature being inappropriate for us. They can't/won't ever venture down the path of a re-write of the Big Book.

Joe C. seems to speak my mind better than I do, and he once rhetorically asked, "Why should I have to use their language? Why should I have to 'come around' and use terms like God and Higher Power? I don't go to my baseball games and talk about a Power greater than myself with my team mates, why do I have to in recovery?" I, Jaye, don't have a God of my understanding because, in my belief system, there is no God to be understood in any fashion or form. So step 3 does NOT work for me "just fine" as it is.

To this paragraph, "Many of us come from different belief systems and cultures, yet there has always been plenty of latitude in A.A. for members to practice whatever belief works best for them" I say a big, fat BS! If there had been such tolerance of us we wouldn't have had to wait 40 YEARS to get a pamphlet.

It sure doesn't sound like it was written by an atheist, but I am trying to hold an understanding of the handcuffs they had on as they wrote this; how to say this program isn't religious when it walks and squawks like one. I gave 3 stars because I could see myself relenting to 1/3 of the paragraphs, opposing to 1/3 of the paragraphs, and editing 1/3 of the paragraphs.

life-j
on [August 11, 2014 at 9:20 pm](#) said:

So how does that add up to 3 stars?

Jaye
on [August 11, 2014 at 9:40 pm](#) said:

"3 stars - average - but it can be improved"

It is the average writing that I expect from GSO, given the constraints from which they must work or, in hockey points:

2 = win/keep

1 = tie/edit

0 - loss/get rid of

3 = total

Thomas B.
on [August 11, 2014 at 5:53 pm](#) said:

When I first read the pamphlet, I gave it a 3, being in an almost ecstatic, “pink-clouded” illusory state that finally after 39 years GSO had been so moved to at least acknowledge formally that we exist !-!-!

Reading it again, along with the comments, I would if I could but can’t downgrade my rating to 1.5.

The pamphlet is woefully inadequate to the point of being seriously flawed to effectively portray the beliefs, or lack thereof, of many of us WAFTS, BUT, it nevertheless is a beginning, as scant and ineffectual as it may be. The initial quote of Bill’s, at least acknowledges and reaffirms that we have as much right to be in AA as the most ardent Big Book and Bible-thumping fundamentalist christian, terrified that we are denigrating and desecrating his jesus-inspired AA.

Others will attest that I am incredibly surprised - shocked really - that even this poor excuse of a pamphlet to address our non-beliefs got the substantial unanimity (two-thirds votes to approve) of the General Service Conference Delegates. Certainly, this sampling of AA Agnostica readers - the crowd the pamphlet was supposed to address - amply demonstrates GSO’s Literature Committee shall certainly get a lot to think about. However, I’m somewhat skeptical that it shall anytime soon - most likely not in my lifetime - even consider any substantial revision to the pamphlet.

The truth is that North American AA exists in a culture that is steeped in the Christian tradition. Therefore, I agree completely with Stephanie’s comment: *The GSO is clearly still mired in clueless Christian majoritarianism...*

Yup, GSO certainly reflects the majority Christian tradition of North America. After all, since 2003, under the leadership of an evangelical President, the US has led a “coalition of the willing” in another vicious western crusade against heathen Muslims. Today the US provides much of the weaponry that the state of Israeli is using to eradicate the native Palestinian population in Gaza in much the same way that US military forces eradicated the Native American population, moving them off their homelands and into squalid reservations.

To devout Christians, we Atheists and Agnostics are “the other”: objects to be shunned and eradicated if we don’t convert. In this Pew poll released Wednesday, [How Americans Feel About Religious Groups](#), atheists are a mere one point higher than Muslims, the most negatively rated religious group in the US.

So, do I expect GSO to ever more effectively respond to our non-beliefs? In a word, no. I think we have gotten about as much as can rationally be expected of the predominantly Christian theists.

I am powerless over GSO to more fully include our non-beliefs - however, I am NOT powerless over being a positive power of example in the meetings I attend that one can, indeed, get and stay sober, living a long, productive and useful life in recovery, without the dogmatic trappings of AA’s god-centered literature. That’s where I’m putting my energies these days, a day at a time...

Frank M.
on [August 11, 2014 at 4:14 pm](#) said:

One star.

The pamphlet's main point seems to be that AA recognizes many paths to God. The couple of nods to secular ideas are far too brief, and seem more intended to show that these approaches are already well supported by the 12 Step language "God as we understood Him" or Appendix II.

This is basically an apologia for how well AA works exactly as is. There is no real attempt here to expand AA's availability to non-theists or to address their particular needs.

What's really very telling is that the pamphlet would be far better if the entire thing were cut except for the opening quote. The message in that quote, that AA should be more open to its members employing any "creed or principle or therapy" that works, is enormously important. Sadly, the rest of the pamphlet fairly contradicts that simple message.

The only way this pamphlet could be viewed as successful is if you assume that its purpose is to reassure alcoholics that AA accepts many definitions of "God."