

**AROUND THE FELLOWSHIP, ITEM 3:
REQUEST TO RECONSIDER THE 2010 CONFERENCE ACTION
#17 STATING THAT WE DEVELOP LITERATURE THAT
FOCUSES ON SPIRITUALITY AND INCLUDES STORIES FROM
ATHEISTS AND AGNOSTICS WHO ARE SUCCESSFULLY SOBER
IN ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS**

The 2010 General Service Conference approved by substantial unanimity that the trustees' Literature Committee develop literature "which focuses on spirituality that includes stories from atheists and agnostics who are successfully sober in Alcoholics Anonymous and bring a draft progress report to the 2011 Conference Committee on Literature." In response to the 2010 Conference action, requests went out for submission of stories, and the draft progress report to be sent to the Conference Literature Committee has been or is being prepared. As of the recent January 29 board meeting, the trustees' Literature Committee agreed to forward to the 2011 Conference Committee on Literature the above request to reconsider the action, which is framed in the context that the 2010 Conference members acted on emotion and were not well informed. Please note that the Conference Committee on Literature will proceed with the review of the trustees' progress report on the development of the literature, as is its responsibility, in the uncertainty of the outcome of this request.

The authors of the request further stated that they are opposed to the development of this piece of outreach literature based on the conviction that the decision was misguided and is potentially harmful to A.A. as a whole. According to a letter dated November 21, 2010, generally speaking, such specialty literature is divisive and that specifically in this case the 2010 GSC action was an "effort to change our principles to accommodate a specific group of people," who, it has been suggested by some, might consider attending a different program of recovery. On the other hand, the proponents of the action maintain that specialty outreach pamphlets are designed to reach newcomers who might not easily see that people like them (defined by whatever feature) can also recover and that a compilation of stories from atheists and agnostics who are sober following the Twelve Steps can be yet another useful tool in reaching suffering alcoholics. I imagine the 198 plus people who submitted stories in response to the Conference action would agree.

The opposition to having the spirituality-based literature that includes stories from atheists and agnostics maintains that any literature that attempts to describe current atheists and agnostics as being “successfully sober” in A.A. would be “deceptive, misleading, and harmful to real alcoholics attempting to find the power necessary to solve their problem.” Such literature will doom A.A. to failure because it fundamentally opposes the authentic program of recovery as detailed in the Big Book. Atheism cannot fit within the philosophy of A.A. Furthermore, the need for such literature is negated by the fact that atheists and agnostics *are* sober in the program and became sober when there was no such literature, so there is no need.

Those who submitted the request for reconsidering the 2010 Conference action make points that could just as easily be used in rebuttal to the request:

- *The program of A.A. is outlined in the Big Book which is our society’s basic text. This book gives a clear cut direction on how to practice AA’s Twelve Steps which are described, in the Forward to the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, as “a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which if protected as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole.”*
- *Practicing the Twelve Steps enables alcoholics to develop faith in a Higher Power (or God of one’s understanding) that is sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism.*
- *And this, taken from the Big Book, page 17: “The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action.*

No one here would argue that the program of Alcoholics Anonymous is not a spiritual program, no matter what one’s personal definition of that is, for each of us has been transformed from the miserable drunks that we once were into these shining faces of recovery, living a life of service. We do have a program for living that allows limitless expansion, a life that is rich and meaningful. Spirituality, defined as an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of connectedness with a larger reality, such as a power greater than self, and a way of finding hope, comfort, and inner peace in life, results from working the Twelve Steps.

Those who have supported the development of the pamphlet on spirituality including stories from atheists and agnostics want to reach the newcomer who is deterred by the frequent references to God. A newly abstemious drinker still reeling from the effects of constant alcohol abuse may misinterpret even the phrase “God of our own understanding”. The newcomer may hear in the first few meetings that A.A. is a spiritual, not religious program, yet the Lord’s Prayer, a Christian prayer, is recited at the end of many meetings. Bill W. in a Grapevine article in April 1961 said “our concepts of a higher power and God as we understand Him afford everyone a nearly unlimited choice of a spiritual belief and action.” He went on to say that we might develop a more sympathetic awareness within our own ranks.

The discussion on whether or not to develop a specialty piece of literature on spirituality that includes stories from atheists and agnostics has been going on for years, and today the discussion continues. Our founding fathers debated on an acceptable concept of God and, in the end, left it up to the individual member to personalize their own beliefs within the framework of the A.A. program. Some say that we do not need any new literature, that what we have worked fine for them, so it should work fine for the next guy. Others say let’s make sure we don’t miss any opportunity to reach a sufferer. One belief is certain: we all have but one primary purpose, to carry the message to the alcoholic who suffers. And once we reach a newcomer, we all hope that she or he stays with us long enough to experience sobriety. Many sober atheists and agnostics feel that literature on this concern would have helped them in their early recovery. Some would say it’s OK to talk about spiritual diversity but not to include stories from atheists and agnostics who are successfully sober in Alcoholic Anonymous. So here we are, with many still in doubt as to how we are to achieve the ingenious action of how to communicate our “nearly limitless choice of spiritual belief and action.”