

The Plain Language Bigga Booka

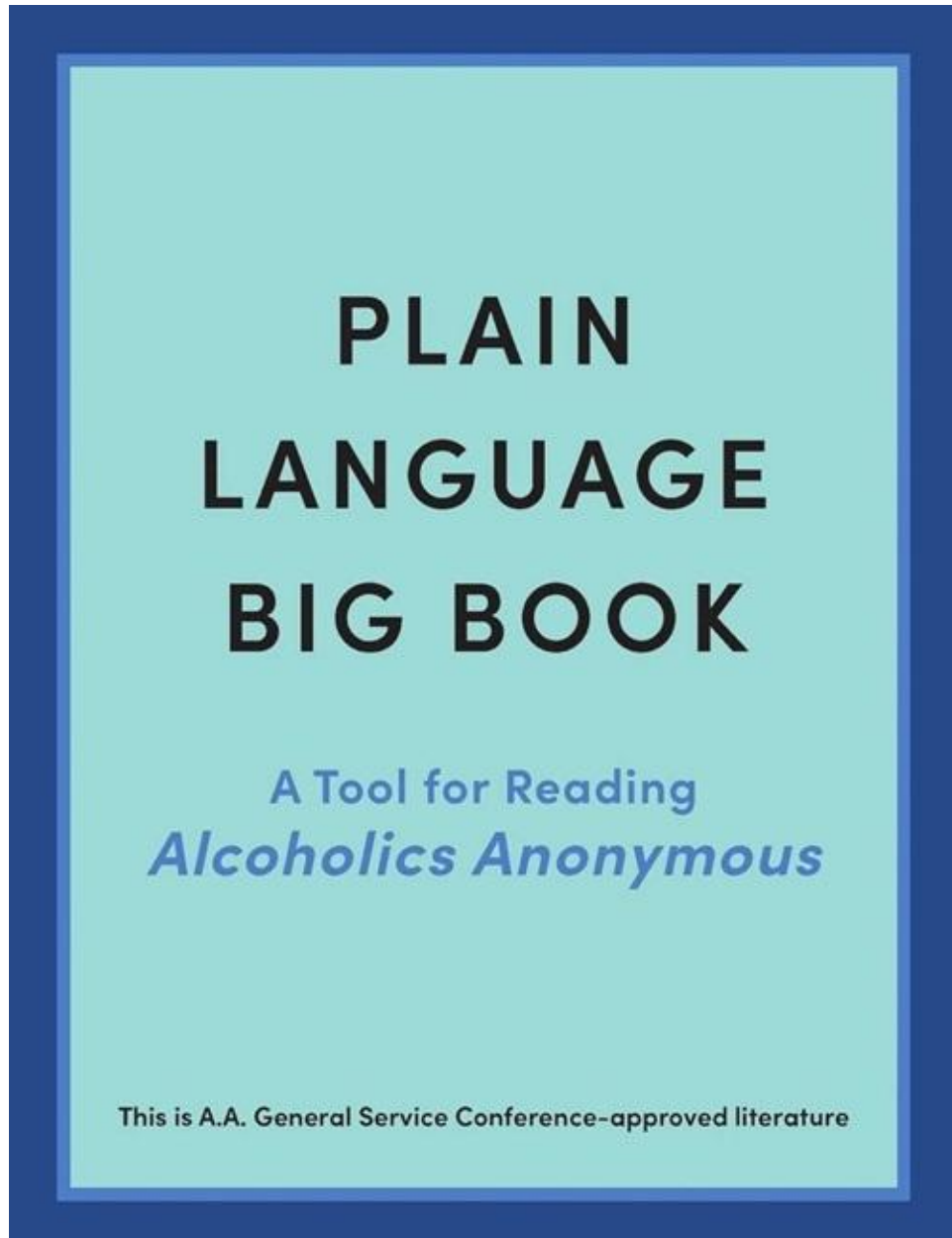


By Bobby Beach

In case you are unfamiliar with the acronym, PLBB stands for *Plain Language Big Book*. The General Service Conference (GSC) approved the publication of a supplemental version of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* specifically aimed at the many Americans with limited reading skills. The book was made available for sale November 1. By all accounts, sales are brisk.

The simplified text has been written at a 5th Grade reading level. This volume does *not* replace the Bigga Booka. An unaltered Fifth Edition of the divinely-inspired original is expected next year (possibly 2026) and will carry us well past AA's 100th anniversary with *no significant change* to the 1939 text.

If the idea of a simplified book seems to you to be an excellent way to improve AA's outreach to the underprivileged populations that also experience higher rates of addiction and incarceration, I agree. The inmate who attends the AA meeting brought by volunteers into the institution will soon be able to be given a (soft cover) book that they will have a chance of reading and understanding. They will be able to explore what AA has to offer and perhaps garner some self-esteem by working their way through a book on their own. Words like "vicissitudes" and "fallacious" have been replaced by simpler terms with the same meaning.



Is the New Book Needed?

A bit of Googling shows that the American Psychological Association reports that 21% of adults in the United States read below a 5th-grade level and 19% of high school graduates struggle with reading. The U.S. Department of Education found that only 54% of adults read at a proficient level. There is certainly a large population who stands to benefit from having a simpler Bigga Booka to read. Even apart from generational differences in idiom, the 1939 volume is written above the comprehension level of millions of potential readers. Dr. Bob Smith remarked in the 1940s that he thought the original text was “over the head” of the average factory worker.

A 2021 General Service Conference resolution says as follows: “A study was done in the U.S. to find out the literacy level of people. Literacy means the ability to identify or evaluate one or more pieces of information, which requires different levels of interpretation of a text. Experts have assessed the level required to read and understand the text of the Big Book. They have determined that it corresponds to level 3 on a scale of 5. According to studies conducted in the U.S., 48% of the population was at a level 3 or higher. That means that 52% of the population would not have been able to sufficiently understand what is written in the Big Book.”

The second PLBB mission is to make the book more relatable to 21st Century readers. That has sparked a great many rumors.

Secularization

Prior to the book’s release, many of those in the anti-PLBB camp were warning about the pending secularization of the Bigga Booka. God was going to be removed!! There has been a lot of Facebook chatter about “hidden agendas.” The woke, leftist, liberal progressives were pushing their woke ideas! (Is the opposite of “woke” “asleep”? Asking for a friend.)

The removal of God simply didn’t happen.

In the dreaded “WE AGNOSTICS” chapter of the Plain Language Bigga Booka, the word “God” appears 54 times! Check out the “secular” slant of the rewrite.

“... ‘the God stuff’... was the only way to begin recovering...” (p. 54)

“... spirituality is the only way to deal with alcoholism...” (p. 54)

“We just needed to decide what God meant to us... Accepting the idea that God may exist is all you need to start building a spiritual practice for yourself.” (p. 57)

“We saw that we might be destroyed by our alcoholism if we didn’t create a relationship with God. We decided that changing our thinking about spirituality was better than the alternative.” (pp. 57-58)

“Many of us stubbornly cling to the idea that our universe needs no God to explain its mysteries... Doesn’t that sound a little arrogant?” (p. 58)

“God’s existence was as clear and true as our own existence. We connected with God deep inside of ourselves.” (p. 62)

“God has come to all who have honestly sought a connection with a Power greater than themselves. When we allowed ourselves to become closer to God, we found God.” (p. 63)

Holy mislabeling, Bobby Beach!! The freaken Pope is more secular than that chit!!! Are the folks who predicted secularization lining up to apologize?

The human animal hates being wrong, Grasshopper. They keep grasping at straws. The removal of a few "Him's" remains sacrilegious in the "We shoulda stayed in the Oxford Group" camp. Although AA offers some latitude in choosing one's own conception of God, the Christers are hopeful that you'll come around to theirs.

"Higher Power" is a Bigga Booka term and in the PLBB, it is used to replace some of the "Him" references.

"Higher Power" (with capital letters) is explicitly equated with God – there's no secularization – but the God of the PLBB *is* a good deal more compatible with the diverse spirituality of twenty-first century believers. Christian AA fundamentalists are on the warpath about these subtle modifications. Their full right to practice the faith of their choice is entirely undisturbed but their right to impose that creed on everyone else in AA has taken a hit. Think about *that* during the Lord's Freaken Prayer!!

If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It

The *Plaina Language Bigga Booka* has been *slightly* de-Christianized. It seems to have been forgotten that the first de-Christing of the text came at the hands of Billa Wilsona! (Sorry, I got carried away) The name "Jesus" does not appear in the vaunted "First 164."

The "We don't want to change anything" folks are freaking out! They are opposed by the "We need to adapt to survive" people. The first group *loves* the phrase *If it ain't broke, don't fix it*. They assume the *ain't broke* part is true but it ain't... er.... I mean isn't. Based on AA's own figures, membership peaked in 1992. That's quite a long time ago. The drop in numbers of over 500,000 (20%) has even more impact when we factor in an increase in population of about 30%. Outside of the United States, AA is having even greater difficulty clinging to its market share.

In the simplest way of looking at these issues, those acknowledging that AA has problems fall into two distinct camps regarding causality:

1. AA is too much like it was 1939;
2. AA is not enough like it was in 1939.

The second group opposes all change of any kind. These are the folks who detest *Living Sober* and even the *The Twelve and Twelve*. They hate the introduction "Hi, I'm Chris. I'm an alcoholic and an addict." They have a distaste for discussion meetings. They want the damned atheists and the damned agnostics to get the hell out and take the freaken druggies with them. Form your own God-hating organization and leave us alone!!!

They are outraged by Bill W.'s liberal statements about inclusivity but trot out some 1959 letter in which he defends AA's use of the Lord's Prayer like it was chiselled onto stone

tablets. These folks are outraged that changes are being made to the divinely freaken inspired Bigga Booka, albeit that isn't what's happening. The PLBB is a supplemental text not a replacement.

To Partners

When the Bigga Booka rolled off the presses on April 10, 1939, Florence R. was the only sober woman. Her First Edition story, "A Feminine Victory," was the one and only account of a female alcoholic. A strong case can easily be made that AA's principal text was written by men for men. Here's the strong case: ***Because it was!*** We have Dr. Bob's famous remarks from the summer of 1939: "We have never had a woman. We will not work on a woman."

A chapter in the 1939 book is addressed to the spouses of alcoholics and it was called "TO WIVES." Since then, well over a million women alcoholics have gotten sober in AA. Eighty-five years past the publication of the original text, we have a chapter addressed to spouses and it's called "TO WIVES." *Here you go, Joe! Read this and you'll know how to support Mary in her sobriety.*

Over the years, various authors have suggested that the steps can be beneficial for women by employing a certain amount of tweaking. ("Tweaking" is what woke people do when they want to feel special, apparently) Thus we've seen publications such as *The Little Red Book for Women* and *A Woman's Guide to the Twelve Steps. We're Not All Egomaniacs* offers its modifications based on personality type.

Is Beth H. daring to say that we alcoholics ain't all exactly the same, Bobby?

It be so, my shame-based friend.

In the PLBB, AA's 12-step process has not been altered but the text employs more she/her pronouns thus reflecting a female component that has risen beyond a third of the total AA membership. The jaywalker character is a female in the PLBB, as is the employer in the Step Four chart. These are small "steps" – inadequate ones from the perspective of many – but better than nothing. The idiom of nine decades ago has been replaced in a number of instances. "Boiled as an owl" finds a more modern expression as does "the grouch and the brainstorm" and other phrases likely to be unfamiliar in 2024. More relatable terms take their place.

If you are still not seeing cause for objection, neither am I.

And yet, there is a panic among those opposing the new book that the liberal GSO (General Service Office) staff has brought its leftist agenda to Alcoholics Anonymous. The Make AA Great Again crowd has a huge problem with the term "partners." LGBTQ+ people use that term and *why the Hell are we giving them special treatment????!!!* It's no great surprise that those objecting to "partners" also vociferously oppose the Preamble change of "men and women" to "people."

The Sky is Falling

The Fifth Edition is coming and will maintain its devotion to the words published in 1939. If that volume comes out in 2026, 25 years after the Fourth Edition which came out 25 years after the Third Edition, the opposers of change should be pretty safe until the Sixth Edition circa 2050. The dreaded slippery slope we're warned of is far from precipitous. Nevertheless, the fear-mongering and future-tripping proceed at a furious pace. The good news is that this most vocal minority is indeed a minority.

So why are the fundies so panicked, Bobby Beach?

Well, Grasshopper, it's freaken fun screeching "The sky is falling!! The sky is falling!!" and it's ego-gratifying being a defender of the faith. The sky probably is falling, My Coca Cola-drinking Friend, but for different reasons.

Bobby Beach has contributed a variety of articles to AA Agnostica.
