

The A.A. Neutral Zone

Rick R.

I do not think I have known a single alcoholic that, when they are first exposed to Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), didn't have to step back and question their thinking about how the issue of "a power greater than myself" was going to work out for them. Depending on whether they were Atheists, Agnostics, or Former Believers, it seems hard to get comfortable with what turns out to be an all-inclusive approach to the resolution of the disease of alcoholism. Each time that topic is discussed at a meeting it seems that many of us think we must tell everyone our concept of God while others get the impression that they are being lured into believing in a God of a religious nature. Having read the Big Book, and the 12&12 many times I can see why they could get that impression.

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) began in 1935 and I was born in 1941. It was a different culture then and as I can remember those years, everything revolved around the different churches in the community at the time. On Sunday morning I could look out the window and see the family groups walking toward the different churches at the time. Today in some areas of the Midwest and the South, this has not changed much but in much of the rest of the country it has been overtaken by what is referred to as a progressive society and much of that part of the population have a more liberal approach to faith or have no belief in God at all.

The book Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book) was published in 1939 after it was said to have been edited by the first 100 A.A. members at the time, and I would venture to guess that many of them came from a religious environment, so it is not hard for me to understand why it is written the way it is. It was the culture of that time. I also believe that if the founders of AA did not have the wisdom to insist that the original printing of the Big Book be kept intact, and not be edited, it could have set a precedent that could have destroyed A.A. before too long.

Understanding these cultural dynamics and how they evolved the way they did, many of us have come to our own way of expressing our concept of faith in a power greater than ourselves. Although it does not always sound like it, AA is virtually a neutral zone, and doesn't have any requirements when it comes to this issue, except that, to be successful we have to be willing to except outside help, and that may be as simple as asking for help and guidance and turning your will (EGO) over to the fellowship of AA.

Having a desire to stop drinking is the only requirement for A.A. membership but that does not mean that everyone that comes in the door is successful at once. Some will relapse and must start over again and again until they run out of options and only then does that desperation render them teachable. They often have a profound change of perception about what is important in life. If a person wants to call that a spiritual experience, that is OK with me if it helps them to cross over that wall of denial that we all had in our drinking days.

The word faith is synonymous with the words trust and reliance. On page 27 in the 12&12 it says: "To acquire it I had only to stop fighting and practice the rest of A.A.'s program as enthusiastically as I could. That is as simple as it gets. Being in the neutral zone worked great for me.

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