

My Higher Power - The Light Bulb

by Clarence H. Snyder

(Clarence got sober in 1938, was sponsored by Dr. Bob, & started AA group #3 in Cleveland. In the first few years of his recovery Clarence helped more people get sober than Bill W. & Dr. Bob COMBINED. His story, "Home Brewmeister", can be found on page 297 of the 3rd Edition Big Book.)

In their sincere & honest attempt to maintain a "hands-off" policy regarding fellow members' religious beliefs & perhaps sensitivities, our founding fathers exercised gentle wisdom & proffered spiritual freedom. No one, it was rightly thought, should be permitted to impose his or her own religious concepts & beliefs upon any other member of the fellowship. This area was much too important to the prospective recoveree to be tampered with by mortal man. The very life of the prospect depends, ultimately, upon his or her "personal relationship" with a "Power greater than themselves." The notion was valid in the Program's earlier days - AND IT STILL IS!

In no way, shape or form, however, was the idea conceived to avoid guiding our beloved newcomer along the path of spiritual progress. Quite the contrary, our whole purpose as recovered alcoholics, was & is to help the next person achieve sobriety. If that person is a real alcoholic his only hope is God. So in its most basic & simplest terms our only real purpose is to help the still-suffering alcoholic to find God. A loving God, a healing God is the alcoholic's only real hope.

This is no easy task. A vast array of difficulties presents themselves to thwart the new person on his journey. The foremost adversary, of course, is the illness itself. It seems that many, many alcoholics have a very fierce, emotionally charged resistance to accepting any dependence upon a Power, which, to them, may seem an abstract & remotely distant concept.

This internal resistance is most effectively broken down by the potential recoveree's initial desperation. (It seems such a shame that today's AA actually encourages the newcomer to avoid reaping the blessings of that desperation.) If intense enough & deep enough, this emotional "bottom" will be the very propellant the prospect needs to thrust him into the recovery process offered by AA through its 12 Steps.

Another stumbling block, which many people who are new to the program are currently encountering, is us! We seem to be full of fear regarding the responsibility we have been given in the area of spiritual guidance. We shirk this responsibility by evasiveness or by the direct sidestepping of the issue by such statements as, "It's God as you understand Him, & it's up to you to come to your own conclusions." So the newcomer is left to his own devices. He is expected to arrive, alone & unguided, at a relationship with his Creator.

One of the most powerful & hope-filled statements to be found in the entire text of Alcoholics Anonymous can be found on page 25. "The great fact is just this, & nothing less: That we have had deep & effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows & toward God's universe. The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts & lives in a way that is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do for ourselves." Are we, today, so far removed from our founder's results of our recovery program that these words are nothing more than a "nice thought" or an exaggeration due to artificially elated emotions? If so, we "obviously cannot transmit something we don't have." We cannot share awareness we don't have. Cannot give guidance we have never gotten. We cannot share a vision of God we have never seen. Our lack, thereby, becomes the newcomer's & he may die because of it! Our resistance becomes his license. In his liquor befogged mind he does not seek & experience God but begins to "create" one. It's no wonder his dryness becomes so barren that in a short while he returns to drink. His "Higher Power" was a light bulb! (No joke. We have heard this comment voiced more than once & not only by a newcomer!) Or perhaps this power greater than himself was a chair, or a wall, or even a mere mortal sponsor. A quick glance at the top of page 93 of the "Big Book" makes instantly clear a very important qualification in the concept of "...as you understand Him," & that is: "He can choose any conception he likes, PROVIDED IT MAKES SENSE TO HIM."

Power greater than himself - a light bulb? A simple flick of a switch turns off that power. A wall? Not so powerful when confronted with a bulldozer. A chair? An axe can make quick kindling of that higher power. A sponsor then? If he fails to perfect his spiritual life, his old foe alcohol is sure to reclaim him. So he won't do very well as a greater power. How about a whole group? Possibly for someone else, but not for us. If one person is powerless over alcohol, & another, we would have a group of people who are powerless over alcohol. We do not have a group who ARE POWERFUL over alcohol. Yet they do not drink! They have gained access to something more powerful than alcohol.

It was never intended that phrases such as "higher power," "power greater than ourselves," or "as we understood Him" were created as an enabling device to justify our membership's continued avoidance of a connection with our Creator. Page 46 of the AA book says, "we found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice & express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power which is God." Again, "...that Power, which is God." Our founders apparently held no reservations, whatsoever, with Who was dealing with them. Perhaps, we would be well advised to think twice before we attempt any ourselves. Alcoholics Anonymous is not allied with any religion, as we well know. But it is allied with God, "for our very lives as ex-problem drinkers depend on it." It is allied with spirituality, for despite what our preamble states, AA is not a "fellowship," it is a spiritual way of life.

It is our most earnest desire that no one reading this feel that we are trying to impose any presentation of God of His nature on anyone. Our real hope is that a reader may be jolted from a position of complacency or spiritual evasion & get about the business of recovery.