

History of the AA Preamble

In 1947, because of the growing interest in AA, the Grapevine editors decided to write a brief definition of the Fellowship. Thus, the AA Preamble was first published in the June 1947 issue. They used portions of the Foreword to the first edition of the Big Book.

The Grapevine had just begun to circulate among non-alcoholics, and the Preamble was intended primarily to describe for them what AA is and is not. It is still often used for public information purposes.

As time passed, it began appearing in all Conference-approved publications, and many groups now use it to open meetings.

The original version was slightly different from what we know today. For example:

1) It stated that the only requirement for membership is an HONEST desire to stop drinking, and 2) it contained only the very brief statement "AA has no dues or fees."

At the 1958 General Service Conference, a delegate pointed out that the word "honest" does not appear in the Third Tradition, and suggested that it should be deleted from the Preamble. Many delegates felt that as AA had matured, it had become almost impossible to determine what constitutes an honest desire to stop drinking, and also that some who might be interested in the program could be confused by the phrase. The mid-summer 1958 meeting of the General Service Board ratified the deletion, and since then the Preamble has read simply "a desire to stop drinking."

The phrase "AA has no dues or fees" also was clarified to read as it presently does: "There are no dues or fees for AA membership, we are self-supporting through our own contributions." The current version of the Preamble appears on the first page of every issue of the Grapevine.

Source: The AA Grapevine Workbook

By Nancy O.

Other AA Preambles

A few months after the Grapevine published the Preamble in June 1947, Ollie L., Dick F., and Searcy W. decided to beef it up for the drunks in Texas. "We worked on it, passed it around, and agreed on this version," says Searcy W. "It's now read by groups throughout the state." It works for Searcy. He's been sober 54 years.

Texas Preamble:

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

We are gathered here because we are faced with the fact that we are powerless over alcohol, and are unable to do anything about it without the help of a Power greater than ourselves.

We feel each person's religious convictions, if any, are his own affair, and the simple purpose of the program of AA is to show what may be done to enlist the aid of a Power greater than ourselves, regardless of what our individual conception of that Power may be.

In order to form a habit of depending upon and referring all we do to that Power, we must first apply ourselves with some diligence, but repetition confirms and strengthens this habit, then faith comes naturally.

We have all come to know that as alcoholics we are suffering from a serious disease for which medicine has no cure. Our condition may be the result of an allergic reaction to alcohol, which makes it impossible for us to drink in moderation. This condition has never, by any treatment with which we are familiar, been permanently cured. The only relief we have to offer is absolute abstinence - a second meaning of AA.

There are no dues or fees. The only requirement is an honest desire to stop drinking. Each member is a person with an acknowledged alcoholic problem who has found the key to abstinence from day to day by adhering to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. The moment he resumes drinking he loses all status as a member of AA. His reinstatement is automatic, however, when he again fulfills the sole requirement for membership – an honest desire to quit drinking.

Not being reformers we offer our experience only to those who want it. AA is not interested in sobering up drunks who are seeking only temporary sobriety. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree and in which we join in harmonious action. Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are those who will not or cannot lend themselves to this simple program-- usually men and women who are incapable of being honest with themselves. You may like this Program or you may not, but the fact remains that it works.. and we believe it is our only chance to recover.

There is a vast amount of fun included in the AA fellowship. Some people may be shocked at our apparent worldliness and levity, but just underneath there is a deadly earnestness and a full realization that we must put first things first. With each of us the first thing is our alcoholic problem. Faith must work twenty-four hours a day in and through us, or we perish.

We are gathered here because we are faced with the fact that we are powerless over alcohol and unable to do anything about it without the help of a Power greater than ourselves. We feel that each person's religious views, if any, are his own affair. The simple purpose of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous is to show what may be done to enlist the aid of a Power greater than ourselves, regardless of what our individual conception of that Power may be.

In order to form a habit of depending upon and referring all we do to that Power, we must at first apply ourselves with some diligence. By often repeating these acts, they become habitual and the help rendered becomes natural to us.

We have all come to know that as alcoholics we are suffering from a serious illness for which medicine has no cure. Our condition may be the result of an allergy which makes us different from other people. It has never been by any treatment with which we are familiar, permanently cured. The only relief we have to offer is absolute abstinence, the second meaning of A.A.

There are no dues or fees. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. Each member squares his debt by helping others to recover.

An Alcoholics Anonymous is an alcoholic who through application and adherence to the A.A. program has forsworn the use of any and all alcoholic beverage in any form. The moment he takes so much as one drop of beer, wine, spirits or any other alcoholic beverage he automatically loses all status as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. A.A. is not interested in sobering up drunks who are not sincere in their desire to remain sober for all time. Not being reformers, we offer our experience only to those who want it.

We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree and on which we can join in harmonious action. Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our program. Those who do not recover are people who will not or simply cannot give themselves to this simple program. Now you may like this program or you may not, but the fact remains, it works. It is our only chance to recover.

There is a vast amount of fun in the A.A. fellowship. Some people might be shocked at our seeming worldliness and levity but just underneath there lies a deadly earnestness and a full realization that we must put first things first and with each of us the first thing is our alcoholic problem. To drink is to die. Faith must work twenty-four hours a day in and through us or we perish.

In order to set our tone for this meeting I ask that we bow our heads in a few moments of silent prayer and meditation.

I wish to remind you that whatever is said at this meeting expresses our own individual opinion as of today and as of up to this moment. We do not speak for A.A. as a whole and you are free to agree or disagree as you see fit, in fact, it is suggested that you pay no attention to anything which might not be reconciled with what is in the A.A. Big Book. If you don't have a Big Book, it's time you bought you one. Read it, study it, live with it, loan it, scatter it, and then learn from it what it means to be an A.A.

The Wilmington Preamble has long been surrounded by controversy and discussion of such has sparked many a debate almost from its inception in the early years of Alcoholics Anonymous. The history of our fellowship has mostly been passed from member to member over the expanse of many years; member whose very disease has a tendency to distort one's memory. Inaccuracies may prevail. The following is in no way an attempt to dispel those controversies, but an effort to establish an accurate history of the birth of the Wilmington Preamble and to keep it's true history alive for the enlightenment of future generations. Documentable corrections are welcomed.

The Wilmington Preamble's birth ties in with one of Wilmington's earliest members, Shoes L. Shoes joined the Wilmington Group and got sober in May of 1944. The following month in June, Shoes was Chairman of the group and in charge of getting speakers for their meetings. There was at this time a sportswriter in town covering the horseraces at Delaware Park. His name was Mickey M. and Shoes asked him to speak at the group's meeting. Mickey replied that he wasn't much of a speaker but that he would write something appropriate. He reportedly went back to his room at the Hotel Dupont and wrote the Wilmington Preamble as we know it and it was read the following Friday night.

Being a sportswriter, Mickey M. covered events in other towns, and while in Baltimore covering the races at Pimlico gave the same preamble to the Baltimore Group which they also adopted as their own. Where it was actually read first is the subject of many debates but one fact remains clear, that this "Preamble" was widely accepted in Maryland and Delaware long before World Service sanctioned the shorter A.A. Preamble that is more universally accepted today.

The Wilmington AA Preamble:

We of Alcoholics Anonymous are a group of persons for whom alcohol has become a major problem. We have banded together in a sincere effort to help ourselves and other problem drinkers recover health and maintain sobriety.

Definitions of alcoholics are many and varied. For brevity we think of an alcoholic as one whose life has become unmanageable to any degree due to the use of alcohol.

We believe that the alcoholic is suffering from a disease for which no cure has yet been found. We profess no curative powers but have formulated a plan to arrest alcoholism.

From the vast experience of our many members we have learned that successful membership demands total abstinence. Attempts at controlled drinking by the alcoholic inevitably fail.

Membership requirements demand only a sincere desire on the part of the applicant to maintain total abstinence.

There are no dues or fees in A.A.; no salaried officers. Money necessary for operating expenses is secured by voluntary contributions.

Alcoholics Anonymous does not perform miracles, believing that such powers rests only in God.

We adhere to no particular creed or religion. We do believe, however, that an appeal for help to one's own interpretation of a higher power, or God, is indispensable to a satisfactory adjustment to life's problems.

Alcoholics Anonymous is not a prohibition or temperance movement in any sense of the word. We have no criticism of the controlled drinker. We are concerned only with the alcoholic.

We attempt to follow a program of recovery which has for its chief objectives: Sobriety for ourselves; help for other alcoholics who desire it; amends for past wrongs; humility; honesty; tolerance; and spiritual growth.

We welcome and appreciate the cooperation of the medical profession and the help of the clergy.