

Bill W. and Dr. Bob



A Study Guide

presented by

San Jose Repertory Theatre

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SAN JOSE
Rep

BY

SAMUEL SHEM

AND

JANET SURREY

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Bill W. and Dr. Bob

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SYNOPSIS

A GREAT AMERICAN STORY ABOUT HEALING AND CONNECTION

This quick-witted and honest docu-drama follows two dynamic and dedicated men who, in the midst of their battle with acute and debilitating alcoholism, forged a formidable and historic alliance to help others combat the same addiction. Bill Wilson, a stockbroker who crashed with the stock market, finds himself in a bar. He could have pursued any number of distractions — a game of solitaire, a book — instead he chose to make a phone call. Through an astonishing series of events, punctuated by bitter humor, comes the inspiring, true story of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This work does not imply affiliation with or endorsement from Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc.

"Funny and fast moving... mesmerizing drama.
This is what good theatre should be."

-TalkinBroadway.com

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About the Playwrights



SAMUEL SHEM, Co-author

Samuel Shem, the pen-name of Stephen Bergman, is a doctor, novelist, playwright and activist. A Rhodes scholar, he was on the faculty of Harvard Medical School for three decades. Shem has been described in the press as "Easily the finest and most important writer ever to focus on the lives of doctors and the world of medicine", and "He brings mercy to the practice of medicine." "The Lancet" called *The House of God* "one of the two most significant medical novels of the 20th century." Its sequel, *Mount Misery*, reviewed as

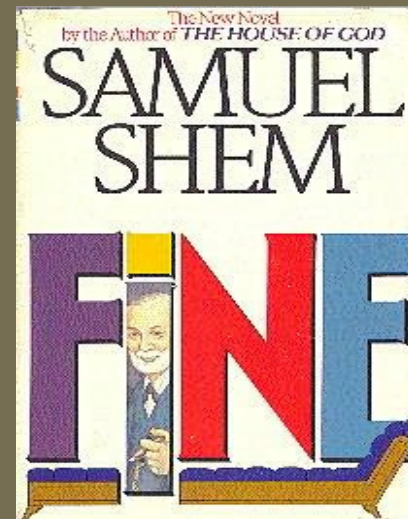
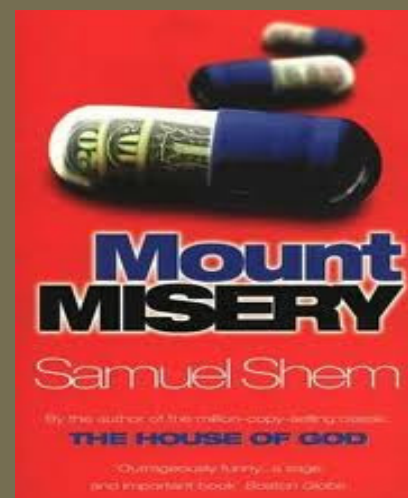
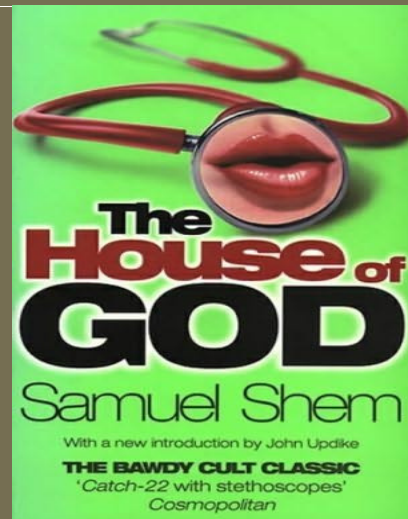
"another medical classic," is about training to be a psychiatrist; *Fine* is about a psychoanalyst.

His 2008 novel, *The Spirit of the Place*, about a primary care doctor in a small town, was reviewed as "the perfect bookend to *The House of God*." It won the "National Best Book Award 2008 in General Fiction and Literature" from "USA Book News," and the "Independent Publishers National Book Award in Literary Fiction 2009."

As a playwright, with his wife, Janet Surrey, he wrote the Off Broadway hit play *Bill W. and Dr. Bob*, about the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous, which won the "Performing Arts Award of the National Council on Alcoholism 2007," and is being produced all over the country. He was playwright-in-residence at the Boston Shakespeare Company, and has had many other plays produced, including *The Shem Plays*, Off-Off-Broadway, which were published in *The Best Short Plays* anthologies.

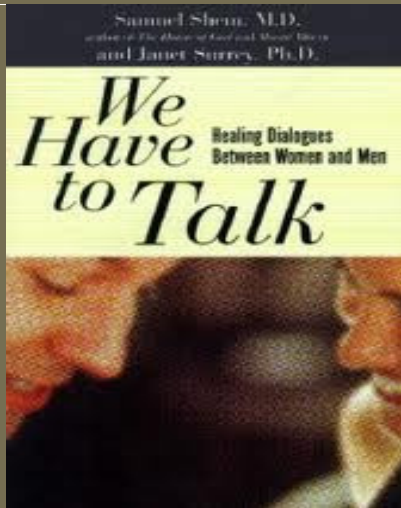
With Janet Surrey he has also published the nonfiction book *We Have to Talk: Healing Dialogues Between Women and Men*, which was the winner of the Boston Interfaith Council's Paradigm Shift Award, 1999.

He has given over fifty commencement speeches on "How to Stay Human in Medicine," including in 2009 at his alma mater, Harvard Medical School. Shem and Surrey live in Boston and Tierra Tranquila Costa Rica. Website: www.samuelshem.com



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About the Playwrights



JANET SURREY, Co-author

Janet Surrey is a clinical psychologist, author, Buddhist teacher, and founding scholar of the Jean Baker Miller Training Institute at Wellesley College. She is co-author of *Women's Growth in Connection*, and *Mothering Against the Odds*, as well as other nonfiction books that deal with women's relational psychology, addiction, and spirituality.

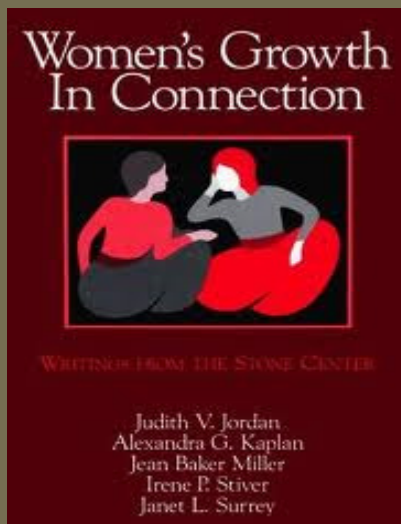


She was a faculty member at Harvard University for many years, and is now a member of the Institute of Meditation and Psychology in Boston.

She is co-author, with her husband Samuel Shem, of *Bill W. and Dr. Bob* and *We Have to Talk: Healing Dialogues Between Women and*

Men, which won the 1999 "Paradigm Shift Award of the Boston Interfaith Council," and also a curriculum, "Making Connections: Building Gender Dialogue and Community in Secondary Schools, 2006."

Known for her writing and speaking all over the world, she recently completed a training program to be a Community Dharma Leader. She and Stephen Bergman live in Boston and Costa Rica.



BILL W. and Dr. BOB

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Alcoholism

Medical Definition of Alcoholism

This comprehensive definition of Alcoholism was published by the Journal of the American Medical Association in 1992. This definition was prepared by the Joint Committee to Study the Definition and Criteria for the Diagnosis of Alcoholism of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence and the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

Approved by the Boards of Directors of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (February 3, 1990) and the American Society of Addiction Medicine (February 25, 1990).

Definition of Alcoholism -- published by the Journal of the American Medical Association

" Alcoholism is a primary, chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. The disease is often progressive and fatal. It is characterized by continuous or periodic: impaired control over drinking, preoccupation with the drug alcohol, use of alcohol despite adverse consequences, and distortions in thinking, most notably denial ."

Primary refers to the nature of alcoholism as a disease entity in addition to and separate from other pathophysiological states which may be associated with it.

Primary suggests that alcoholism, as an addiction, is not a symptom of an underlying disease state.

Disease means an involuntary disability. It represents the sum of the abnormal phenomena displayed by a group of individuals. These phenomena are associated with a specified common set of characteristics by which these individuals differ from the norm, and which places them at a disadvantage.

Often progressive and fatal means that the disease persists over time and that physical, emotional, and social changes are often cumulative and may progress as drinking continues. Alcoholism causes premature death through overdose, organic complications involving the brain, liver, heart and many other organs, and by contributing to suicide, homicide, motor vehicle crashes, and other traumatic events.

Impaired control means the inability to limit alcohol use or to consistently limit on any drinking occasion the duration of the episode, the quantity consumed, and/or the behavioral consequences of drinking.

Preoccupation in association with alcohol use indicates excessive, focused attention given to the drug alcohol, its effects, and/or its use. The relative value thus assigned to alcohol by the individual often leads to a diversion of energies away from important life concerns.

Adverse consequences are alcohol-related problems or impairments in such areas as: physical health (e.g., alcohol withdrawal syndromes, liver disease, gastritis, anemia, neurological disorders); psychological functioning (e.g., impairments in cognition, changes in mood and behavior); interpersonal functioning (e.g., marital problems and child abuse, impaired social relationships); occupational functioning (e.g., scholastic or job problems); and legal, financial, or spiritual problems.

Denial is used here not only in the psychoanalytic sense of a single psychological defense mechanism disavowing the significance of events, but more broadly to include a range of psychological maneuvers designed to reduce awareness of the fact that alcohol use is the cause of an individual's problems rather than a solution to those problems. Denial becomes an integral part of the disease and a major obstacle to recovery.

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The Twelve Steps

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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Twelve Step Programs

A **Twelve-Step Program** is a set of guiding principles (accepted by members as 'spiritual principles,' based on the approved literature) outlining a course of action for recovery from addiction, compulsion, or other behavioral problems. Originally proposed by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) as a method of recovery from alcoholism, the Twelve Steps were first published in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* in 1939. The method was then adapted and became the foundation of other twelve-step programs. As summarized by the American Psychological Association, the process involves the following:

- admitting that one cannot control one's addiction or compulsion;
- recognizing a higher power that can give strength;
- examining past errors with the help of a sponsor (experienced member);
- making amends for these errors;
- learning to live a new life with a new code of behavior;
- helping others who suffer from the same addictions or compulsions.

Twelve-step methods have been adopted to address a wide range of substance-abuse and dependency problems. Over 200 self-help organizations—often known as fellowships—with a worldwide membership of millions—now employ twelve-step principles for recovery. Narcotics Anonymous was formed by addicts who did not relate to the specifics of alcohol dependency. Similar demographic preferences related to the addicts' drug of choice has led to the creation of Cocaine Anonymous, Crystal Meth Anonymous, Pills Anonymous and Marijuana Anonymous. Behavioral issues such as compulsion for, and/or addiction to, gambling, crime, food, sex, hoarding, debting and work are addressed in fellowships such as Gamblers Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Sexual Compulsives Anonymous, Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous, Clutterers Anonymous, Debtors Anonymous and Workaholics Anonymous. Auxiliary groups such as Al-Anon and Nar-Anon, for friends and family members of alcoholics and addicts, respectively, are part of a response to treating addiction as a disease that is enabled by family systems. CoDependents Anonymous (CoDA) addresses compulsions related to relationships, referred to as codependency.

Recovery is sought in several areas: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

For addicts and alcoholics the physical dimension is best described by the allergy-like bodily reaction resulting in the compulsion to continue using substances after the initial use. For groups not related to substance abuse this physical manifestation could be more varied including, but not limited to: compulsive hoarding, distractibility, eating disorders, dysfunctional enabling, hyperactivity, hypomania, insomnia, irritability, lack of motivation, laziness, mania, panic attacks, psychosomatic illnesses, poor impulse control,

There are a great many Twelve Step programs that have been developed on the model pioneered by Bill W. and Dr. Bob of Alcoholics Anonymous. What follows is a short list of a sample of some of those programs:

AA	Alcoholics Anonymous
ACA	Adult Children of Alcoholics
Al-Anon/Alateen	for friends and family members of alcoholics
CA	Cocaine Anonymous
CLA	Clutterers Anonymous
CMA	Crystal Meth Anonymous
Co-Anon	for friends and family of addicts
CoDA	Co-Dependents Anonymous, for people working to end patterns of dysfunctional relationships and develop functional and healthy relationships
DA	Debtors Anonymous
EHA	Emotional Health Anonymous, for recovery from mental and emotional illness
FA	Families Anonymous, for relatives and friends of addicts
FAA	Food Addicts Anonymous
GA	Gamblers Anonymous
Gam-Anon/Gam-A-Teen	for friends and family members of problem gamblers
HA	Heroin Anonymous
MA	Marijuana Anonymous
NA	Narcotics Anonymous
NAIL	Neurotics Anonymous, for recovery from mental and emotional illness

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Twelve Step Programs

Nar-Anon	for friends and family members of addicts
NicA	Nicotine Anonymous
OA	Overeaters Anonymous
OLGA	Online Gamers Anonymous
PA	Pills Anonymous, for recovery from prescription pill addiction.
SA	Sexaholics Anonymous
SA	Smokers Anonymous
SAA	Sex Addicts Anonymous
SCA	Sexual Compulsives Anonymous
SIA	Survivors of Incest Anonymous
SLAA	Sex & Love Addicts Anonymous
WA	Workaholics Anonymous



procrastination, self-injury and suicide attempts. The statement in the First Step that the individual is "powerless" over the substance-abuse related behavior at issue refers to the lack of control over this compulsion, which persists despite any negative consequences that may be endured as a result.

The emotional obsession is described as the cognitive processes that causes the individual to repeat the compulsive behavior after some period of abstinence, either knowing that the result will be an inability to stop or operating under the delusion that the result will be different. The description in the First Step of the life of the alcoholic or addict as "unmanageable" refers to the lack of choice that the mind of the addict or alcoholic affords concerning whether to drink or use again.

The illness of the spiritual dimension, or "spiritual malady," is considered in all twelve-step groups to be self-centeredness. This model is not intended to be a scientific explanation, it is only a perspective that twelve-step organizations have found useful. The process of working the steps is intended to replace self-centeredness with a growing moral consciousness and a willingness for self-sacrifice and unselfish constructive action. In twelve-step groups, this is known as a spiritual awakening or religious experience. This should not be confused with abreaction, which produces dramatic, but ephemeral, changes. In twelve-step fellowships, "spiritual awakening" is believed to develop, most frequently, slowly over a period of time.

It is suggested that members regularly attend meetings with other members who share their particular recovery problem. In accordance with the First Step, twelve-step groups emphasize self-admission by members of the problem they are recovering from. It is in this spirit that members often identify themselves along with an admission of their problem, e.g. "Hi, I'm Wendy and I'm an alcoholic."

A sponsor is a more experienced person in recovery who guides the less-experienced aspirant ("sponsee" or variously, "sponsee") through the program. New members in twelve-step programs are encouraged to secure a relationship with at least one sponsor. Publications from twelve-step fellowships emphasize that sponsorship is a "one on one" relationship of shared experiences focused on working the Twelve Steps.

According to Narcotics Anonymous:

Sponsors share their experience, strength, and hope with their sponsees... A sponsor's role is not that of a legal adviser, a banker, a parent, a marriage counselor, or a social worker. Nor is a sponsor a therapist offering some sort of professional advice. A sponsor is simply another addict in recovery who is willing to share his or her journey through the Twelve Steps.

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Co-Dependency



Addiction always occurs in a context. Just like animals and plants require particular atmospheres to survive, there needs to be sufficient interior and/or external support for an addiction to grow. The contextual issues supporting addiction occur both within the person developing the addiction and in the surrounding atmosphere.

Inside, addiction is affected by one's personality traits and attitude, as well as beliefs, genetic inheritance, history of distress and tolerance for coping with life's challenges. Outside, addiction is affected by important relationships such as family and friends, along with cultural beliefs and social influences.

The family is not just a group of people but instead it is a system with each individual affecting the other; it is a system just as the human body is a system. All the parts are linked together and react and interact with each other. For example, if an individual were to fracture a bone, the other parts of their body would have to adjust to prevent putting pressure on the hurt limb and so the system is then organized around the injury and adjustments. In the case of alcoholism and addiction, the family system organizes itself around the disease and all members are profoundly effected in their new roles.

Any system is made up of three components:

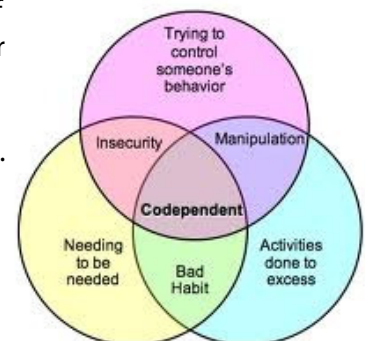
1. individual parts
2. somehow linked together
3. to accomplish something that no individual part could accomplish on its own

In a family, the parts are the family members. They are linked together by rules and boundaries. The primary goal is to maintain balance within the system in order to survive.

Systems have rules governing how the parts of the system interact with each other, roles that different parts of the system assume in contributing to the whole, and many other features. Family systems may function in healthy or unhealthy ways, support adaptive or maladaptive behavior, and support or not support the development of addiction. The rules and boundaries dictate how close people may get to one another, how they relate, what topics can be openly discussed, and what feelings may be expressed. All families have unwritten rules that are instinctively known. Some rules are spoken like "The children go to bed at 8pm," and some are unspoken like "unpleasant feelings should not be felt or shared." The rules of the family strive to keep the status quo. A system will always seek homeostasis or maintaining the status quo even if that is painful due to the nature of systems. That is why so many of the symptoms of addiction are the same systems in codependency, the same obsessions and compulsions and getting locked in doing something that is causing us pain.

The boundaries have to do with how "connected" we are with each other. If the boundaries are not clear we become enmeshed, and family members have no clear identity of their own. If members are not connected enough, we are disengaged from one another and there is no feeling of closeness. It takes a major catastrophe to get anyone to react or do anything in a disengaged family. Families fall on a continuum that ranges from nurturing to dysfunctional. Most fall in between on this continuum. No family is perfect.

Symptoms: Controlling behavior, distrust, perfectionism, avoidance of feelings, intimacy problems, care-taking behavior, hyper vigilance, denial, physical illness related to stress. It is believed that we become codependent through living in systems (families) with rules that hinder development, flexibility and spontaneity.



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Co-Dependency

The Unhealthy Family System

The following factors are characteristic of an unhealthy family system. Sometimes the addictive behavior can cause these factors to develop or strengthen; other times, these factors unintentionally influence the development of the addiction. Either way, the cycle must be broken for the family system to be supportive of a lasting recovery.

Rigid: The system does not allow for people to function outside of their respective roles. Therefore individuals are reinforced for "acting out" their unresolved conflict and unexpressed emotions.

Inconsistent: Due to the nature of addiction, sporadic and erratic behavior on the part of the "addicted person" results in instability within the entire system.

Unpredictable: As the disease progresses, it may become increasingly difficult to predict behavior, outcomes, etc. other than chaos and turmoil. This lifestyle often propels other family members into "crisis living."

Impulsive: Decisions are made whimsically or based on a reaction rather than a proactive course of rational action.

Closed: The unexpressed message is that no one enters or leaves from "Our Inner Circle." Therefore, families are isolated from resources that may intervene or provide support. Family members choosing not to operate in the mode of dependency are maligned with judgment, guilt, alienation and/or rejection.

The Healthy Family System

A key goal in recovery is to change an unhealthy family system into a healthy one. This is not only supportive of the addict's recovery, but is also much more fulfilling for all family members. Characteristics of healthy family systems include:

Respectful: Family rules are explicit, clear, well defined, reasonable and consistently enforced. Boundaries support healthy respectful behavior.

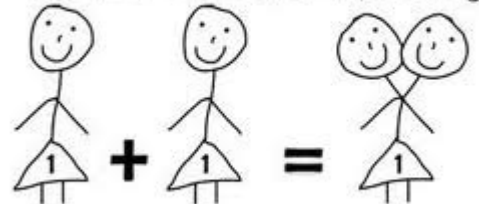
Flexible: The system is able to accommodate changes and role diversity without becoming rigid or intolerant. In other words, people are allowed to express their unique self and adjust/move through roles accordingly. In unhealthy family systems, roles are inflexible and people are only supported while functioning in their respective roles.

Predictable: Family behavior, interactions, and customs/traditions are consistent and predictable while allowing for spontaneity. As the disease of addiction progresses, behavior may grow increasingly difficult to predict. This lifestyle often propels family members into "crisis living," resulting in a lack of safety.

Open Communication: Communication is open rather than closed. Individuals are allowed to express feelings and needs without fear of reprisal, ridicule or retaliation from other family members. Family members are allowed to need help and support and communicate problems and conflicts openly. Unhealthy family systems often disallow communication within the family and support family isolation from the community and other resources. The message in these families is don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel. Individuals are supported in their differences and in their separation/individuation process.

The changes and adaptations that occur when addiction is present in a family are normal but unhealthy. This unhealthy pattern that emerges is commonly called codependency.

The Mathematics of Co-dependency



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Alcoholic Slang

AFGO - A f--king growth opportunity

Big Book - *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the text used by those in the program

Big Book Thumper - A regular who knows the Big Book inside and out

Boxed - A person thrown out of the house with their boxed up belongings

Camel Chip - A chip signifying a person with long-term sobriety

Chip - AA chip marking certain amount of continuous sobriety i.e. 30 days

Cleaning House - Getting your life in order

Clean Side Of Street - Getting your life in order

Double Dip - Speaking twice at the same AA meeting

Dry Drunk - A non-drinking alcoholic who does not follow the program

Elevator - How low one goes before getting into recovery

Fellowship - Membership of Alcoholics Anonymous

Friend of Bill W. - Someone who's in the program

Going Out - An alcoholic who goes back out to drink again

Heavy Metal - A 1-year chip

Newcomer - An alcoholic who has less than 30 days of continuous sobriety

Normie - A term used by alcoholics to describe "normal" people

Nudge From The Judge - Court ordered to go to AA

Pink Cloud - A warm fuzzy feeling that "newcomers" feel in early recovery

Playground - People with whom we socialized before recovery

Relapse - An alcoholic who goes back out and takes another drink

Retread - An alcoholic who has relapsed and returned to the program

Running and Gunning - Active drinking

Tape - Remembering the truth to prevent relapse

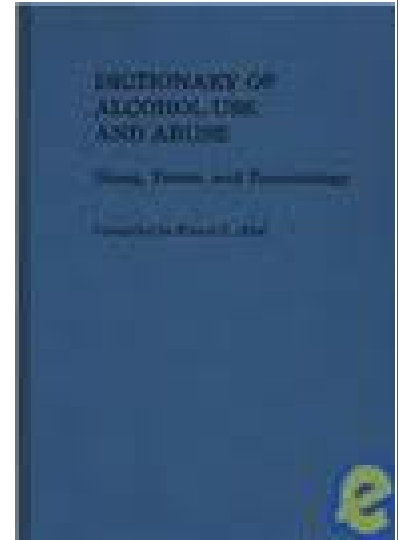
Three Hots and a Cot - Jail term for three mails and a bed

13th Step - Dating someone in the program

Wet Drunk - A practicing alcoholic

Whiner Chip - Chip representing 18 months sobriety

Working the Steps - actively doing the work necessary to remain sober



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Who's Who in the Play



William Griffith Wilson (known as Bill Wilson or Bill W.) was born on November 26, 1895, in East Dorset, Vermont, at his parents' home and business, the Mount Aeolus Inn and Tavern. His paternal grandfather, William Wilson was an alcoholic who never drank after a conversion experience on Mount Aeolus. Both of Wilson's par-

ents abandoned their child (his father never returned from a purported business trip, and his mother left to study osteopathic medicine). Bill and his sister were cared for by their maternal grandparents, Fayette Griffith and Ella Griffith, in their house. As a teen, Wilson showed determination, once spending months designing and carving a working boomerang.

Wilson met his future wife, Lois Burnham, who was four years older than he, during the summer of 1913, while sailing on Vermont's Emerald Lake; two years later the couple became engaged.

The June 1916 incursion into the U.S. by Pancho Villa brought about Wilson's service in the Vermont Guard. The following year he was commissioned as an artillery officer. During military training in Massachusetts, the young officers were often invited to dinner by the locals, and Wilson had his first drink, a glass of beer, to little effect. A few weeks later at another dinner party, Wilson drank some Bronx cocktails, and felt at ease with the guests and liberated from his awkward shyness; "I had found the elixir of life," he wrote. "Even that first evening I got thoroughly drunk, and within the next time or two I passed out completely. But as everyone drank hard, not too much was made of that."

Wilson married Lois on January 24, 1918, just before he left to serve in World War I as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Coast Artillery. After his military service, Wilson returned to live with his wife in New York. He failed to graduate from law school because he was too drunk to pick up his

diploma. Wilson became a stock speculator and had success traveling the country with his wife, evaluating companies for potential investors. However, Wilson's constant drinking made business impossible and ruined his reputation.

In 1933 Wilson was committed to the Charles B. Towns Hospital for Drug and Alcohol Addictions in New York City four times under the care of Dr. William D. Silkworth. Silkworth's theory was that alcoholism was a matter of both physical and mental control: a craving, the manifestation of a physical allergy (the physical inability to stop drinking once started) and an obsession of the mind (to take the first drink). Wilson gained hope from Silkworth's assertion that alcoholism was a medical condition rather than a moral failing, but even that knowledge could not help him. He was eventually told that he would either die from his alcoholism or have to be locked up permanently due to *Wernicke encephalopathy* (commonly referred to as "wet brain").

In November 1934, Wilson was visited by old drinking companion Ebby Thacher. Wilson was astounded to find that Thacher had been sober for several weeks under the guidance of the evangelical Christian Oxford Group. Wilson took some interest in the group, but shortly after Thacher's visit, he was again admitted to Towns Hospital to recover from a bout of drinking. This was his fourth and last stay at Towns hospital under Doctor Silkworth's care. It was while undergoing treatment with The Belladonna Cure that Wilson experienced his "Hot Flash" spiritual conversion and quit drinking. According to Wilson, while lying in bed depressed and despairing, he cried out, "I'll do anything! Anything at all! If there be a God, let Him show Himself!" He then had the sensation of a bright light, a feeling of ecstasy, and a new serenity. He never drank again for the remainder of his life. Wilson described his experience to Dr. Silkworth, who told him, "Something has happened to you I don't understand. But you had better hang on to it".

Wilson joined the Oxford Group and tried to help other alcoholics, but only succeeded in keeping sober himself. During a failed business trip to Akron, Ohio, Wilson was tempted to drink again and decided that to remain sober

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Who's Who in the Play

he needed to help another alcoholic. He called phone numbers on a church directory and eventually secured an introduction to Dr. Bob Smith, an alcoholic Oxford Group member. Wilson explained Doctor Silkworth's theory that alcoholics suffer from a physical allergy and a mental obsession. Wilson shared that the only way he was able to stay sober was through having a spiritual experience. Dr. Bob was familiar with the tenets of the Oxford Group and upon hearing Wilson's experience, "began to pursue the spiritual remedy for his malady with a willingness that he had never before been able to muster. After a brief relapse, he sobered, never to drink again up to the moment of his death in 1950". Wilson and Dr. Bob began working with other alcoholics. After that summer in Akron, Wilson returned to New York where he began having success helping alcoholics in what they called "a nameless squad of drunks" in an Oxford Group there.

In 1938, after about 100 alcoholics in Akron and New York had become sober, the fellowship decided to promote its program of recovery through the publication of a book, for which Wilson was chosen as primary author. The book was given the title *Alcoholics Anonymous* and included the list of suggested activities for spiritual growth known as the Twelve Steps. The movement itself took on the name of the book. Later Wilson also wrote the Twelve Traditions, a set of spiritual guidelines to ensure the survival of individual AA groups. The AA general service conference of 1955 was a landmark event for Wilson in which he turned over the leadership of the maturing organization to an elected board.

During the last years of his life, Wilson rarely attended AA meetings to avoid being asked to speak as the co-founder rather than as an alcoholic. A heavy smoker, Wilson eventually suffered from emphysema and later pneumonia. He continued to smoke while dependent on an oxygen tank in the late 1960s. He drank no alcohol for the final 37 years of his life; however, in the last days of his life he made demands for whiskey and became belligerent when refused. During this period, Wilson was visited by colleagues and friends who wanted to say goodbye. Wilson died of emphysema and pneumonia on January 24, 1971, en route to treatment in Miami, Florida. He is buried in East Dorset, Vermont.



Lois Burnham Wilson, the wife of Bill Wilson and co-founder of The Al-Anon Family Groups, was born Lois Burnham on March 4, 1891 at 182 Clinton Street in Brooklyn Heights, New York. Her father, Clark Burnham, was a gynecologist and surgeon and her mother, Matilda Spelman, was a young woman of refinement.

Lois was the eldest of six children. In her memoir, *Lois Remembers*, Lois recalls her childhood as "idyllic," and it seems that this is an accurate assessment.

The children were respected and deeply loved by their parents and were brought up to be loving and thoughtful. They were given excellent educations and sent to college, with Lois graduating from The Packer Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn. All of the children went to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn which was one of the first U.S. schools to have a new type of preschool started in Germany called "kindergarten". Later, they were enrolled in the Quakers' Friends School.

Lois' primary interests were mostly artistic. She would later become interested in interior decoration, but also showed interest in fine art. After graduating from the Packer Institute, she took drawing classes at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art.

The Burnhams taught their children to be thoughtful and caring toward others and to be of use in the world. The impressions of her home life are ones of excitement and lots of fun. Lois was particularly adventuresome, cared little about how she looked, and was often referred to as a tomboy.

This aspect of her personality was given its fullest expression during the Burnhams' long sojourns in southern Vermont where her father could care for his New York patients summering in the state. Her parents were part of the upper-class social life there and were friends with many well-known people of the day.

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Who's Who in the Play

One of the children the Burnhams (especially Lois' brother Rogers) played with was a boy who came each summer with his prominent family from Albany, New York. His name was Edwin or "Ebby", and he would also become a close friend of Lois' future husband, Bill Wilson, and be instrumental in Bill's getting sober.

Rogers also found a pal in Bill Wilson, and in 1913 introduced him to his sister. Lois was more than four years older than Bill and did not regard him as anything other than her brother's friend. But as the summers went on, she and Bill eventually found many common interests and gradually fell in love. The couple became secretly engaged in 1915 and married on January 24, 1918, before young officer Wilson shipped off to Europe in the First World War.

When Lois married Bill, she wed an upstanding young man of good character filled with exciting ideas about his future. What Lois did not marry was a drinker. It was a great shock to Lois some months later when, visiting her husband in his New Bedford, Massachusetts station, his soldier friends told her about Bill getting so drunk one night that they had to carry him back to the barracks.

When Bill left for England, Lois found work as an occupational therapist. As an educated woman, Lois believed in being independent and making her own living. She worked at the YWCA and was promoted several times within the organization leaving in 1917 to assist at a school her aunt had established in Short Hills, New Jersey. She left that position to marry Bill.

When Bill returned from the war, Lois hoped to start the family she always wanted. However, a series of ectopic pregnancies made childbearing impossible. This was devastating to Lois and she knew that Bill also desperately wanted children. She and Bill tried to adopt, but they were unsuccessful. She later found out why - agencies performing routine background checks would eventually be told about Bill's drinking, which had been increasing heavily since they married.

Bill's drinking alarmed Lois very much. At first, she tried not to be concerned, but his drinking progressed during the early years of their marriage to the point where he would see all his ambitions dashed and his wonderful

opportunities for employment and advancement shattered. He became a broken man who eventually had to seek refuge with his wife in the house of his in-laws.

Lois employed many tactics over the years to help Bill get sober. She really believed she could help him stop drinking, but years later she realized how futile this was. Bill did stop in 1934, but it was not due to the efforts of his wife.

In 1939, Bill and Lois were forced to leave the Burnhams' house. Her father had left the house to them several years earlier, but they couldn't make the payments and the house was eventually foreclosed upon. For a while they rented the house from the bank, as the Depression was on and no one was buying. When the house was sold in 1939, the Wilsons could not afford to go anywhere except to the homes of various friends, which they did for the following two years. Over the years Lois had been the breadwinner, bringing in a modest income from her work in department stores as a decorator and also from her consultations with private clients. While working at Macy's she wrote an article on veneered furniture that was published by the popular *House and Garden* magazine. Living like nomads was difficult for Lois. She did her best and maintained her dignity throughout the ordeal but sometimes despaired that they might be homeless for a very long time.

But in 1941 an extraordinary thing happened. A generous offer was made by an acquaintance for the Wilsons to purchase a home in Westchester County, New York. Due to this magnanimous gesture, the Wilsons moved into their first and real home--Stepping Stones in Bedford Hills, New York. It took 23 years, but they finally had a home of their own.

In 1951, Lois followed the suggestion made by her husband who had crafted the 12 steps of recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous to create a similar 12-step program for the family and friends of alcoholics. In truth, there had been several family groups around the country that Bill had become aware of and Anne Smith, wife of AA co-founder Dr. Bob, had been involved in working with wives and families from the very beginning.

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Bill thought the groups could be consolidated and that Lois should be the one to take it on. (Anne Smith had died in 1949.) Lois was reluctant, not because she did not recognize the need, but because she was 60 and wanted to enjoy life at Stepping Stones tending her garden and involving herself in artistic projects. But Lois' strong sense of service prevailed, and at the end of the 1951 AA General Service Conference, she gathered the delegates' wives and local family groups' members at Stepping Stones to discuss going forward with a formal organization.

Working from Lois' upstairs desk at Stepping Stones, Lois and Anne B., a nearby friend whose husband was in AA, wrote back to 87 non-alcoholics who had written to AA asking for information about alcoholism. The letters had come from the U.S., Canada, Ireland, Australia and South Africa. Forty-eight people wrote back and eventually the organization known as the Al-Anon Family Groups was formed. It now has over 29,000 groups worldwide and a membership of over 387,000.

Lois died on October 5, 1988 at 97 years old. She was present and energetic throughout her latter years and enjoyed good health for most of them. She wanted to live to be 100 and almost did.

Lois Wilson was one of the 20th century's most important women. Her life has been somewhat overshadowed by that of her husband, but, in recent years, she has emerged more visible than before for her unique contribution to humanity. Her tireless efforts and vision made Al-Anon the strong organization it is today and are the

reason why it continues to attract members through its message of hope and renewal.

Robert Holbrook Smith, also known as Dr. Bob, was an American physician and surgeon who co-founded Alcoholics Anonymous with Bill Wilson.



He was born in St. Johnsbury, Vermont, where he was raised, to Susan A. Holbrook and Walter Perrin Smith. As a child he was forced to attend religious services four times a week, with the result that he determined he would never attend religious services when he grew up. He began drinking in college, and early on he noticed that he could recover from drinking bouts quicker and easier than his classmates and that he never had headaches, which caused him to believe he was an alcoholic from the time he began drinking. After graduation from Dartmouth College in 1902, he worked for three years selling hardware in Boston, Chicago, and Montreal and continued drinking heavily. He then returned to school to study medicine. By this time drinking had begun to affect him to the point where he began missing classes. His drinking caused him to leave school, but he returned and passed his examinations for his sophomore year. He transferred to Rush Medical College, but his alcoholism worsened to the point that his father was summoned to try to halt his downward trajectory. But his drinking increased and after a dismal showing during final examinations, the university required that he remain for two extra quarters and remain sober during that time as a condition of graduating. After graduation Smith became a hospital intern, and for two years he was able to stay busy enough to refrain from heavy drinking. He married Anne Robinson Ripley on January 25, 1915, and opened up his own office in Akron, Ohio, specializing in colorectal surgery and returned to heavy drinking. Recognizing his problem, he checked himself into more than a dozen hospitals and sanitariums in an effort to stop his drinking. He was encouraged by the passage of Prohibition in 1919, but soon discovered that the exemption for medicinal alcohol and bootleggers could supply more than enough to continue his excessive drinking. For the next 17 years his life revolved around how to subvert his wife's efforts to stop his drinking and obtain the alcohol he craved while trying to hold together a medical practice in order to support his family and his drinking.

In January 1933, Anne Smith attended a lecture by Frank Buchman, the founder of the Oxford Group. For the next two years she and Dr. Smith attended local meetings of the group in an effort to solve his alcoholism, but recov-

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ery eluded him until he met Bill Wilson on May 13, 1935. Wilson, an alcoholic who had learned how to stay sober by helping other alcoholics through the Oxford Group in New York, was in Akron on business that had proven unsuccessful and he was in fear of relapsing. Recognizing the danger, he made inquiries about any local alcoholics he could talk to and was referred to Smith by Henrietta Sieberling, one of the leaders of the Akron Oxford Group. After talking to Wilson, Smith stopped drinking and invited Wilson to stay at his home. He relapsed almost a month later while attending a professional convention in Atlantic City. Returning to Akron on June 9, he was given a few drinks by Wilson to avoid delirium tremens. He drank one beer the next morning to settle his nerves so he could perform an operation, which proved to be the last drink he would ever take. The date, June 10, 1935, is celebrated as the anniversary of the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Smith was called the "Prince of Twelfth Steppers" by Wilson because he helped more than 5000 alcoholics before his death. He was able to stay sober from June 10, 1935, until his death in 1950 from colon cancer.



Anne Smith

Anne Robinson Ripley was from Oak Park, Illinois. She attended Wellesley College and became a teacher before marrying Dr. Robert Smith on January 25, 1915. She'd had some second thoughts about tying the knot due to the young physician's drinking problems; but Bob had stayed dry for some time by then and Anne

thought perhaps he'd outgrown it and would leave the alcohol problem behind. She was wrong. For twenty years Ann watched her husband wage a losing battle with alcohol and pills while she came close to losing her own battle with hope. In January of 1933, all of that

changed within the course of a week. It was a week unlike any Anne had experienced in all her forty-two years. That was the week that Frank Buchman came to Akron, Ohio accompanied by about thirty members of his Oxford Group.

Akron was a rubber town supplying nearby Detroit with the tires for all the automobiles produced there. Perhaps the largest tire producer in the town was Firestone Rubber and Tire Company owned by industrial magnate Harvey Firestone. It was "old man Firestone" who was responsible for bringing the Oxford Group to town. He'd issued the invitation and covered the expenses for the group to come to Akron out of paternal gratitude for what they'd done for his son Bud, having helped him get sober when many before them had failed. Most of the Protestant churches in Akron opened their pulpits to members of the group, where the congregations listened to powerful stories of "changed lives" brought about through the practice of what they described as their "simple program." Sitting through a session in the ballroom of the Mayflower Hotel was Anne Smith. More than anything, Ann wanted what they had and she left the hotel determined to get it.

For the next two years Anne and Bob attended regular weekly meetings of the Oxford Group run by Henrietta Sieberling. Although Bob was unable to overcome his addiction, Anne gave herself wholeheartedly to the fellowship. She studied and practiced the program, then known as a First Century Christian Fellowship. She surrendered her life to God, made her amends and faithfully practiced Quiet Time by rising early, reading scripture and listening for God's voice each morning. When Henrietta phoned Anne and told her she'd just had a telephone call from a self-described "rum hound from New York" who needed an alcoholic to visit, they both saw God's answer to their prayers. The famous visit between Bill W. and Dr. Bob took place the following day at Henrietta's home. A less famous but equally important visit occurred on that Mother's Day in 1935 when Bill and Anne Smith were introduced.

Much is made in 12 Step circles about the effect Wilson's meeting had on Dr. Bob, but few know of the tremen-

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dous and lasting influence Anne was to have on Bill and on the new program about to be born. As "fate" would have it, Bill Wilson's visit with the Smith's lasted almost three months. Broke and out of work, Wilson accepted an offer to move into the Smith's home at 855 Ardmore Avenue. Bill had been an Oxford Group member for only five months while Ann had been diligently practicing the program for two years. More to the point, however, Bill never enjoyed reading and always struggled with his spirituality, while Ann had amassed a sizeable library of spiritual books and had steeped herself in both prayer and practice. Each morning Bill joined Anne and Bob in their Quiet Time and in the evenings spent time with Henrietta and the other Oxford Group members of Akron. These meetings had a transforming effect on Bill Wilson who wrote of the Smith's: "For the next three months I lived with these two wonderful people. I shall always believe they gave me more than I ever brought them.... Anne and Henrietta infused much needed spirituality into Bob and me...."

Bill Wilson often referred to Anne as "the Mother of A.A." He said she was, "... quite literally, the mother of our first group, Akron Number One. Her wise and beautiful counsel to all, her insistence that the spiritual come before anything else, her unwavering support of Dr. Bob in all his works; all these were virtues which watered the uncertain seed that was to become A.A. Who but God could assess such a contribution? We can only say that it was priceless and magnificent. In the full sense of the word, she was one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous."



Edwin Throckmorton Thacher (commonly known as Ebby Thacher or Ebby T.), was an old drinking friend and later the sponsor of Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill Wilson. He is credited with introducing Wilson to the initial principles that AA would soon develop, such as "one alcoholic talking to another," and the Jungian thesis which was passed along to Rowland Hazard and, in turn, to

Thacher that alcoholism could be cured by a "genuine conversion"

Thacher was a schoolfriend of Wilson, and battled his whole life with alcoholism, frequently landing in mental hospitals or jail. After one bender, three members of The Oxford Group, Rowland Hazard, F. Shepard Cornell, and Cebra Graves, convinced the court to parole Thacher into their custody. Hazard taught Thacher the Oxford Group principles and the idea that a conversion was needed between patients. Hazard lodged him in the Calvary Rescue Mission, operated by the Calvary Episcopal Church in New York.

In November 1934, Thacher had arranged a visit to Wilson's apartment. Expecting to spend a day drinking and re-living old times, Wilson was instead shocked by Thacher's refusal to drink. "I've got religion," he reportedly said to Wilson's surprise. Ebby had found relief from his alcoholism in the simple spiritual practices of the Oxford Group which was an attempt to return to First Century Christianity - before it was complicated and distorted by religious doctrines, dogma and opinions. The program offered by Ebby to Bill involved taking a personal moral inventory, admitting to another person the wrongs we had done, making things right by amends and restitution, and a genuine effort to be of real service to others. In order to obtain the power to overcome these problems, Ebby had been encouraged to call on God, as he understood God, for help.

Bill was deeply impressed by Ebby's words, but was even more affected by Ebby's example of action. Here was someone who drank like Bill drank - and yet Ebby was sober, due to a simple religious idea and a practical program of action. The results were an inexplicably different person, fresh-skinned, glowing face, with a different look in his eyes. A miracle sat directly across the kitchen table from Bill. Ebby was not some "do-gooder" who had read something in a book. Here was a hopeless alcoholic who had been completely defeated by alcohol, and yet, had in effect, been raised from the dead. It was a message of hope for an alcoholic - that God would do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Thacher told Wilson of his conversion at the Rescue Mission and acquainted Wilson

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with the teachings of Rowland Hazard about the Oxford Group life-changing program, as well as the prescription of Carl Jung for a conversion.

Wilson at first declined Thacher's invitation to sobriety, and continued to drink in a more restrained way for a short while, and then was admitted to Towns Hospital on December 11, 1934. Ebby visited him there on December 14th and essentially helped Bill take what would become Steps Four, Five, Six, Seven and Eight.

Wilson stayed sober and eventually formed Alcoholics Anonymous with Dr. Bob Smith while Thacher soon returned to drinking. Wilson always called Thacher his "sponsor," and even though he had returned to drinking, Wilson looked after his friend's welfare for the rest of his life. Thacher struggled on and off with sobriety over the years, and ultimately died sober in Ballston Spa, New York from emphysema in 1966.



Henrietta Seiberling

When Alcoholics Anonymous wanted to mark its birthplace, it looked to the gatehouse of Stan Hywet in Akron. It was there that the two best-known characters in the Alcoholics Anonymous movement -- Dr. Bob Smith and Bill Wilson -- first met. But there was another person present; Henrietta

Buckler Seiberling arranged the meeting, helped nurture the early organization and ever reminded the AA leaders of the need for a strong spiritual underpinning for an alcoholic's recovery.

Seiberling was satisfied to work in the background. The social customs of the day, her background as well as the background of her husband, explained why she opted to play such a role.

Henrietta Buckler was born in Lawrenceburg, Ky., on March 18, 1888. She was reared in Texas where her fa-

ther, Julius Augustus Buckler, was a judge of the Common Pleas Court. She was well educated, graduating from Vassar College, when she was only 15. She majored in music, ideal for the well-bred lady of the day. In 1917, she married John Fredrick Seiberling, eldest son of Akron industrialist F. A. Seiberling.

The Seiberlings had made their fortune -- and lost it -- and gained it back in Akron's rubber industry. By 1917, the Seiberlings had already earned their place in Akron society. Matriarch of the clan, Gertrude Seiberling, was already one of the leaders in the city's cultural and musical scene. John Fredrick and Henrietta moved to Akron after their marriage.

None of the Seiberling did as well financially as their parents. John Fredrick was no exception. He worked for his father's company. It was the financial and family problems that Henrietta faced in the early 1930s that eventually led to her involvement in the creation of the AA.

Seiberling was not an alcoholic; she was, however, involved with the Oxford Movement, an evangelical fellowship of intellectuals who believed in the responsibility of Christians to solve social problems. Seiberling helped organize the group's "alcoholic squad" in Akron.

Dr. Bob Smith and his wife came into the Akron Oxford Group. A physician, Smith was an alcoholic. Aware of his drinking problem, Seiberling invited the Smiths over for a small meeting of the Oxford Group. Members shared their deepest secrets and then Smith admitted for the first time that he was a "secret drinker and I can't stop." The group then prayed together.

The Oxford Movement was not peculiar to Akron. It had groups in many cities throughout the United States and Europe. The Oxford Movement was also a kind of network. Members often contacted others in other cities. It was through this network that Seiberling met Bill Wilson, a stockbroker from New York in Akron on business. Wilson was also a recovering alcoholic. Wilson told Seiberling that he had had a religious experience and found the strength to stop drinking.

Seiberling quickly arranged a meeting between Wilson and Smith. The two worked together to support each

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other as they dealt with alcoholism. Working with Seiberling, they also came up with many of the tenets that still mark Alcoholics Anonymous -- never to drink again, to lead a spiritual life and to share their experiences with others. Initially working through Akron's Oxford Group, Alcoholics Anonymous soon struck out on its own, meeting at the old King School. Bill Wilson acted as the group's promoter; "Dr. Bob" was the "homeyness" that the alcoholics needed at the beginning, Seiberling recalled.

Seiberling added the religious dimension that both Dr. Bob and Wilson resisted initially. The two thought that this might turn the alcoholics away. To which, Seiberling replied, "Well, we're not out to please the alcoholics. They have been pleasing themselves all these years. We are out to please God. And if you don't talk about what God does and your faith, and your guidance, then might as well be the Rotary Club or something like that. Because God is your only source of Power."

While Seiberling nurtured the AA movement, she saw her marriage degenerate. Eventually, she and her husband separated and she moved to New York in 1952. She died there in 1979. She was survived by three children -- Mrs. George Huhn; Dorothy Seiberling, art editor for the old *Life* magazine; and Rep. John Seiberling, congressman from the Akron area.



Billy Dotson

Bill Dotson, the "Man on the Bed," was AA number 3. At his death, he had not had a drink in more than nineteen years. His date of sobriety was the date he entered Akron's City Hospital for his last detox, June 26, 1935. Two days later occurred that fateful day when two sober alcoholics visited him: Dr. Bob Smith of Akron, Ohio, and Bill Wilson, a guest of Dr. Bob's from New York.

A few days before, Dr. Bob had said to Bill: "If you and I are going to stay sober, we had better get busy." Dr. Bob called Akron's City Hospital and told the nurse, a "Mrs. Hall," that he and a man from New York had a cure for alcoholism. Did she have an alcoholic customer on whom they could try it out? She replied, "Well, Doctor, I suppose you've already tried it yourself?"

Then she told him of a man who had just come in with DT's, had blacked the eyes of two nurses, and was now strapped down tight. "He's a grand chap when he's sober," she added.

Dr. Bob prescribed some medications, and then asked her to transfer him to a private room. He also put him on a diet of sauerkraut and tomatoes. That's all he was allowed to eat during his hospitalization.

The nurse told Dr. Bob and Bill that Bill Dotson had been a well-known attorney in Akron and a city councilman. But he had been hospitalized eight times in the last six months. Following each release, he got drunk even before he got home.

Bill's wife, Henrietta Dotson, had talked to Dr. Bob and Bill earlier. When she told her husband she had been "talking to a couple of fellows about drinking" he was furious at her "disloyalty." When she told them that they were "a couple of drunks" Bill didn't mind so much.

Henrietta apparently had quite a conversation with the two men, and she told her husband that their plan for staying sober themselves was to tell their plan to another drunk.

Years later, Bill Dotson reflected on the jumbled thoughts in his mind as his wife left and he began to lapse back into withdrawal stupor: "All the other people that talked to me wanted to help ME, and my pride prevented me from listening to them, and caused only resentment on my part, but I felt as if I would be a real stinker if I did not listen to a couple of fellows for a short time, if that would cure THEM."

So Dr. Bob and Bill talked to what may have been their first "man on the bed." They told him of the serious nature of his disease, but also offered hope for a recovery. "We told him what we had done," wrote Bill, "how we got

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honest with ourselves as never before, how we had talked our problems out with each other in confidence, how we tried to make amends for harm done others, how we had then been miraculously released from the desire to drink as soon as we had humbly asked God, as we understood him, for guidance and protection."

But Bill Dotson was not impressed. He said, "Well, this is wonderful for you fellows, but can't be for me. My case is so terrible that I'm scared to go out of this hospital at all. You don't have to sell me religion, either. I was at one time a deacon in the church and I still believe in God. But I guess he doesn't believe much in me."

But he did agree to see Dr. Bob and Bill again. They came again the next day, and for several days thereafter. When they arrived on July 4, they found Bill's wife, Henrietta, with him.

Eagerly pointing at them, he said to his wife: "These are the fellows I told you about, they are the ones who understand."

Before they could say anything, he told them about his night, how he hadn't slept but had been thinking about them all night long. And he had decided that if they could do it, maybe he could do it, maybe they could do together what they couldn't do separately.

It was apparently on that day that he admitted he couldn't control his drinking and had to leave it up to God. Then they made him get down on his knees at the side of the bed and pray and say that he would turn his life over to God. Before the visit was over, he suddenly turned to his wife and said, "Go fetch my clothes, dear. We're going to get up and get out of here."

He walked out of that hospital on July 4, 1935, a free man, never to drink again. AA's Number One Group dates from that day.

That Fourth of July they had plenty to celebrate. So they had a picnic. The Smiths, Bill Wilson, the Dotsons, and Eddie Riley, the first alcoholic they tried to help were there. (Eddie didn't get sober at first, but later he did, and Eddie said in a talk that there were two firsts in A.A. -- the first one who accepted the program and the first who refused it.)

Within a week, Bill Dotson was back in court, sober, and arguing a case. But at first his wife was doubtful. He had previously gone on the wagon and stayed sober for long periods. But then he drank again. Would this time be different? And he hadn't had that sudden transforming experience that Bill Wilson talked about.

When Lois Wilson visited Akron in July of 1935, Henrietta shared these fears with her, and asked Lois whether she ever worried about her Bill drinking again. Lois answered without hesitation, "No. Never."

The message had been successfully shared a second time. Dr. Bob was no fluke. And apparently you did not have to be indoctrinated by the Oxford Group before the message could take hold.

The three worked with scores of others. "Many were called but mighty few chosen; failure was our daily companion. But when I left Akron in September 1935, two or three more sufferers had apparently linked themselves to us for good," wrote Bill.

Bill Dotson's story appears in the Big Book as "AA Number Three."

Old timers in Akron, according to Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, "recalled that Bill Dotson, was indeed a grand chap when sober. They remembered him as one of the most engaging people they ever knew."

One said: "I thought I was a real big shot because I took Bill D. to meetings," Another noted that, though Bill Dotson was influential in the area he was not an ambitious man in AA. "He wasn't aggressive, just a good A.A. If you went to him for help he would give you help. He would counsel with you. He never drove a car, but he went to meetings every night. He'd stand around with his thumbs in his vest like a Kentucky colonel. And he spoke so slowly, you wanted to reach out and pull the words from his mouth. I loved to be around him. He put you in mind of a real 'Easy Does It' guy -- Mr. Serenity."

His wife, looking back in 1977, described him as "a great alcoholic who, like other alcoholics, didn't want to get drunk." She reportedly remembered telling her pastor, "You aren't reaching him. I'm going to find someone who can, if I have to see everyone in Akron."

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The Oxford Group and Towns Hospital

Assorted Oxford Group books.



The Oxford Group was a Christian organization founded by American Christian missionary Dr. Frank Buchman who had a conversion experience, the result of which was his founding of a movement called *A First Century Christian Fellowship* (1921), which eventually became known as the *Oxford Group* (1931). The Oxford Group was not a religion -- it was a group of people from all walks of life who had surrendered their lives to God. Their goal was to lead a spiritual life and to carry the message so others could do the same. It had no membership, no dues, no paid leaders, no new theological creed, nor regular meetings -- it was simply a fellowship of people who desired to follow a way of life -- a

"determination not a denomination." The group used the terms "Higher Power" and "God" interchangeably. Those involved in the Oxford Group endeavored to live their lives by moral standards they deemed The Four Absolutes: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love, and they advocated Four Spiritual Practices: 1) The sharing of our sins and temptations with another Christian life given to God. 2) Surrender our life past, present and future, into God's keeping and direction. 3) Restitution to all whom we have wronged directly or indirectly. 4) Listening for God's guidance, and carrying it out. Those hoping to change their lives followed The Five C's: confidence, confession, conviction, conversion, and continuance, and The Five Procedures: giving in to God, listening to God's direction, checking guidance, making restitution, and sharing for witness. They strove to conduct themselves in a way that did the maximum amount of good for the maximum number of people, making themselves of maximum use to God and, when they were on target with these efforts, would declare "I'm maximum!" Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith were strongly influenced by the Oxford Group, and carried many of their teachings forward as they developed Alcoholics Anonymous.

Towns Hospital—Charles B. Towns Hospital for Alcoholism and Drug Addiction, founded in 1909, was an institution at 293 Central Park West in New York City that specialized in patients who suffered from alcohol and drug abuse. Using a therapy that consisted of an odd mixture of belladonna (deadly nightshade), along with the fluid extracts of xanthoxylum (prickly ash) and hyoscyamus (henbane), patients would be kept in a mildly sedated state, as they had to be awakened every hour for the administration of their detox cocktail, along with a regimen of cold tomatoes and castor oil. This method, which was often referred to as "puke and purge," caused hallucinations in the patient while they were undergoing treatment (though different hallucinations from those caused by the delirium tremens of alcohol withdrawal) but was, at its completion, thought to "successfully and completely remove poison from the system and obliterate all craving for drugs and alcohol." This medical approach to treating addiction was novel at the time as it had been widely believed that abuse of alcohol was a moral failing. The concept of "alcoholic allergy" was a medical precursor to what is now known as addiction. One of Towns Hospital's most famous patients was Bill Wilson who, under the care of Dr. William D. Silkworth, was treated at Towns Hospital four times. After a spiritual awakening during his last visit, he never took another drink.



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Carl Jung



Carl Gustav Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist and founder of the school of analytical psychology. He proposed and developed the concepts of the extroverted and introverted personality, archetypes, and the collective unconscious. The issues that he dealt with arose from his personal experiences. For many years Jung felt as if he had two separate personalities. One introverted and other extroverted. This interplay resulted in his study of integration and wholeness. His work has been influential not only in psychology, but in religion and literature as well.

When he obtained his M.D. from the University of Zurich, his dissertation was entitled "On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena."

Through this work one of his basic concepts is outlined, the underlying wholeness of the psyche. In Jung's first research he studied word association in patients. He found groups of repressed psychic content for which he invented the now famous word "complex." This study brought him close to the work of Sigmund Freud. Jung's work confirmed many of Freud's ideas. Between 1907 and 1912 he and Freud worked very closely. Many believed that Jung would continue Freud's psychoanalysis, but this did not occur. Over differences of temperament, and those concerning the significance of sexuality in human life, the two split. Jung contested Freud's analytic principles, which he claimed were one-sided and overly-concrete. Their relationship was finished forever when Jung published "Psychology and the Unconscious" which argued against some of Freud's ideas. Jung wanted to understand the symbolic meaning of the contents of the unconscious. In order to distinguish between individual psychology and psychoanalysis Jung gave his discipline the name "analytical psychology."

Jung's book, *Psychological Types*, set the differences between his position and that of Freud. Jung became more interested in the study of mythological and religious symbolism. His studies took him across the globe where he observed many different cultures. He was interested in tracing the analogies between the contents of the unconscious in Western man and the myths, cults, and rituals of primitive peoples. Jungian therapy deals with dreams and fantasies. A discussion is set up between the conscious and the contents of the unconscious. When the therapy works, the patient enters an individuation process. This consists of psychological transformations ending in the opposite tendencies working together to achieve personal wholeness.

Jung believed that symbol creation was a key in understanding human nature. Symbol, as defined by Jung, is the best possible expression for something essentially unknown. He wanted to investigate the similarity of symbols that are located in different religious, mythological, and magical systems which occur in many cultures and time periods. To account for these similar symbols occurring across different cultures and time periods, he suggested the existence of two layers of the unconscious psyche. The first of the two layers was the personal unconscious. It contains what the individual has acquired in his or her life, but has been forgotten or repressed. The second layer is the collective unconscious which contains the memory traces common to all humankind. These experiences form archetypes. These are innate predispositions to experience and symbolize certain situations in a distinct way. There are many archetypes such as having parents, finding a mate, having children, and confronting death. Very complex archetypes are found in all mythological and religious systems. Near the end of his life Jung added that the deepest layers of the unconscious function independently of the laws of space, time and causality. This is what gives rise to paranormal phenomena. The introvert and the extrovert are the main components of personality according to Jung. The introvert is quiet, withdrawn and interested in ideas rather than people. While the extrovert is outgoing and socially oriented. For Jung, a person that had a healthy personality could realize these opposite tendencies within himself/herself and could express each. Dreams serve to compensate for any neglected parts of the personality.

Bill W. and Dr. Bob

Carl Jung and Alcoholics Anonymous

The philosophies of Carl Jung were instrumental in the foundation of Alcoholics Anonymous. Rowland Hazard, the son of a prominent Rhode Island businessman and State Senator, was sent, by his father, for treatment by Jung for his issues with alcohol. Jung pronounced Rowland a chronic alcoholic and therefore hopeless and beyond the reach of medicine as it was at the time. The only hope Jung could offer was for a life-changing "vital spiritual experience" -- he told him that "these occurrences are phenomena. They appear to be in the nature of huge emotional displacements and rearrangements. Ideas, emotions, and attitudes which were once the guiding forces of the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side, and a completely new set of conceptions and motives begin to dominate them". Jung further advised that Rowland's affiliation with a church did not spell the necessary "vital" experience.

This prognosis so shook Rowland that he sought out the Oxford Group, an evangelical Christian movement prominent in the first half of the twentieth century. The Oxford Group was dedicated to what its members termed "the Four Absolutes" as the summary of the Sermon on the Mount: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love. The Group was also dedicated to the vigorous pursuit of personal change, and to extending the message of hope through change by means of "personal" evangelism: one changed person sharing his experience with another. Rowland H. recounted what he gained from Jung to his friend Ebby Thacher who, in turn, passed it on to his friend Bill Wilson. Bill Wilson felt that Jung's understanding of this need for a vital spiritual experience was directly in keeping with the work that he was trying to accomplish with Alcoholics Anonymous. Some years later, Bill Wilson wrote a letter to Dr. Jung expressing his gratitude toward him and told him how important his ideas had been in his life's work. The text of that letter appears below:

January 23, 1961

My dear Dr. Jung:

This letter of great appreciation has been very long overdue.

May I first introduce myself as Bill W., a co-founder of the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous. Though you have surely heard of us, I doubt if you are aware that a certain conversation you once had with one of your patients, a Mr. Rowland H., back in the early 1930's, did play a critical role in the founding of our Fellowship.

Though Rowland H. has long since passed away, the recollections of his remarkable experience while under treatment by you has definitely become part of AA history. Our remembrance of Rowland H.'s statements about his experience with you is as follows:

Having exhausted other means of recovery from his alcoholism, it was about 1931 that he became your patient. I believe he remained under your care for perhaps a year. His admiration for you was boundless, and he left you with a feeling of much confidence.

To his great consternation, he soon relapsed into intoxication. Certain that you were his "court of last resort," he again returned to your care. Then followed the conversation between you that was to become the first link in the chain of events that led to the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous.

My recollection of his account of that conversation is this: First of all, you frankly told him of his hopelessness, so far as any further medical or psychiatric treatment might be concerned. This candid and humble statement of yours was beyond doubt the first foundation stone upon which our Society has since been built.

Coming from you, one he so trusted and admired, the impact upon him was immense. When he then asked you if there was any other hope, you told him that there might be, provided he could become the subject of a spiritual or religious experience - in short, a genuine conversion. You pointed out how such an experience, if brought about, might remotivate him when nothing else could. But you did caution, though, that while such experiences had some-

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times brought recovery to alcoholics, they were, nevertheless, comparatively rare. You recommended that he place himself in a religious atmosphere and hope for the best. This I believe was the substance of your advice.

Shortly thereafter, Mr. H. joined the Oxford Groups, an evangelical movement then at the height of its success in Europe, and one with which you are doubtless familiar. You will remember their large emphasis upon the principles of self-survey, confession, restitution, and the giving of oneself in service to others. They strongly stressed meditation and prayer. In these surroundings, Rowland H. did find a conversion experience that released him for the time being from his compulsion to drink.

Returning to New York, he became very active with the "O.G." here, then led by an Episcopal clergyman, Dr. Samuel Shoemaker. Dr. Shoemaker had been one of the founders of that movement, and his was a powerful personality that carried immense sincerity and conviction.

At this time (1932-34) the Oxford Groups had already sobered a number of alcoholics, and Rowland, feeling that he could especially identify with these sufferers, addressed himself to the help of still others. One of these chanced to be an old schoolmate of mine, Edwin T. ("Ebby"). He had been threatened with commitment to an institution, but Mr. H. and another ex-alcoholic "O.G." member procured his parole and helped to bring about his sobriety.

Meanwhile, I had run the course of alcoholism and was threatened with commitment myself. Fortunately I had fallen under the care of a physician - a Dr. William D. Silkworth - who was wonderfully capable of understanding alcoholics. But just as you had given up on Rowland, so had he given me up. It was his theory that alcoholism had two components - an obsession that compelled the sufferer to drink against his will and interest, and some sort of metabolism difficulty which he then called an allergy. The alcoholic's compulsion guaranteed that the alcoholic's drinking would go on, and the allergy made sure that the sufferer would finally deteriorate, go insane, or die. Though I had been one of the few he had thought it possible to help, he was finally obliged to tell me of my hopelessness; I, too, would have to be locked up. To me, this was a shattering blow. Just as Rowland had been made ready for his conversion experience by you, so had my wonderful friend, Dr. Silkworth, prepared me.

Hearing of my plight, my friend Edwin T. came to see me at my home where I was drinking. By then, it was November 1934. I had long marked my friend Edwin for a hopeless case. Yet there he was in a very evident state of "release" which could by no means be accounted for by his mere association for a very short time with the Oxford Groups. Yet this obvious state of release, as distinguished from the usual depression, was tremendously convincing. Because he was a kindred sufferer, he could unquestionably communicate with me at great depth. I knew at once I must find an experience like his, or die.

Again I returned to Dr. Silkworth's care where I could be once more sobered and so gain a clearer view of my friend's experience of release, and of Rowland H.'s approach to him.

Clear once more of alcohol, I found myself terribly depressed. This seemed to be caused by my inability to gain the slightest faith. Edwin T. again visited me and repeated the simple Oxford Groups' formulas. Soon after he left me I became even more depressed. In utter despair I cried out, "If there be a God, will He show Himself." There immediately came to me an illumination of enormous impact and dimension, something which I have since tried to describe in the book "Alcoholics Anonymous" and in "AA Comes of Age", basic texts which I am sending you.

My release from the alcohol obsession was immediate. At once I knew I was a free man. Shortly following my experience, my friend Edwin came to the hospital, bringing me a copy of William James' "Varieties of Religious Experience". This book gave me the realization that most conversion experiences, whatever their variety, do have a common denominator of ego collapse at depth. The individual faces an impossible dilemma. In my case the dilemma had been created by my compulsive drinking and the deep feeling of hopelessness had been vastly deepened by

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my doctor. It was deepened still more by my alcoholic friend when he acquainted me with your verdict of hopelessness respecting Rowland H.

In the wake of my spiritual experience there came a vision of a society of alcoholics, each identifying with and transmitting his experience to the next - chain style. If each sufferer were to carry the news of the scientific hopelessness of alcoholism to each new prospect, he might be able to lay every newcomer wide open to a transforming spiritual experience. This concept proved to be the foundation of such success as Alcoholics Anonymous has since achieved. This has made conversion experiences - nearly every variety reported by James - available on an almost wholesale basis. Our sustained recoveries over the last quarter century number about 300,000. In America and through the world there are today 8,000 AA groups.

So to you, to Dr. Shoemaker of the Oxford Groups, to William James, and to my own physician, Dr. Silkworth, we of AA owe this tremendous benefaction. As you will now clearly see, this astonishing chain of events actually started long ago in your consulting room, and it was directly founded upon your own humility and deep perception.

Very many thoughtful AAs are students of your writings. Because of your conviction that man is something more than intellect, emotion, and two dollars worth of chemicals, you have especially endeared yourself to us.

How our Society grew, developed its Traditions for unity, and structured its functioning will be seen in the texts and pamphlet material that I am sending you.

You will also be interested to learn that in addition to the "spiritual experience," many AAs report a great variety of psychic phenomena, the cumulative weight of which is very considerable. Other members have - following their recovery in AA - been much helped by your practitioners. A few have been intrigued by the "I Ching" and your remarkable introduction to that work.

Please be certain that your place in the affection, and in the history of the Fellowship, is like no other.

Gratefully yours,

William G. W.

Co-founder Alcoholics Anonymous

Bill Wilson was delighted when, Carl Jung sent him a response to his letter.

There is no way--Bill himself found no way--to express what this letter meant to him. It was a confirmation of all that he, with no formal training, no real guidance, through his own intuition had come to believe. It was that and more. It came at a moment in his life when he needed it.

Ever since his early AA days, when Bill had read Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, he had looked on the great doctor as not wholly a theologian, nor a pure scientist, but as someone who seemed to stand with him in that strange no man's land that lay between. And in his letter, he had passed on the formula: *spiritus contra spiritum*: Higher Power opposes alcoholism.

Bill kept the Jung letter as a talisman. In time it was copied, read at meetings, reprinted in *The Grapevine* (the Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous) but the original stayed in his top desk drawer and, sometimes, even though he knew it by heart, he would open the drawer, look down at the signature and reread a phrase.

A copy of Carl Jung's original letter to Bill Wilson appears on the next page:

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Carl Jung and Alcoholics Anonymous

PROF. DR. C. G. JUNG

KÖSNACHT-ZÜRICH
SEESTRASSE 22B

January 30, 1961

Mr. William G. Wilson
Alcoholics Anonymous
Box 459 Grand Central Station
New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Wilson,
your letter has been very welcome indeed.
I had no news from Roland H. anymore and often wondered what has been his fate. Our conversation which he has adequately reported to you had an aspect of which he did not know. The reason ~~was~~, that I could not tell him everything, *was that* those days I had to be exceedingly careful of what I said. I had found out that I was misunderstood in every possible way. Thus I was very careful when I talked to Roland H. But what I really thought about, was the result of many experiences with men of his kind.
His craving for alcohol was the equivalent on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in mediaeval language: the union with God.¹⁾
How could one formulate such an insight in a language that is not misunderstood in our days?
The only right and legitimate way to such an experience is, that it happens to you in reality and it can only happen to you when you walk on a path, which leads you to higher understanding. You might be led to that goal by an act of grace or through a personal and honest contact with friends, ~~or~~ through a higher education of the mind beyond the confines of mere rationalism. I see from your letter that Roland H. has chosen the second way, which was, under the circumstances, obviously the best one.
I am strongly convinced that the evil principle prevailing in this world, leads the unrecognized spiritual need into perdition, if it is not counteracted either by a real religious insight or by the protective wall of human community. An ordinary man, not protected by an action from above and isolated in society cannot resist the power of evil, which is called very aptly the Devil. But the use of such words arouse so many mistakes that one can only keep aloof from them as much as possible.
These are the reasons why I could not give a full and sufficient explanation to Roland H., but I am risking it with you, because I conclude from your very decent and honest letter, that you have acquired a point of view above the misleading platitudes, one usually hears about alcoholism.
You see, Alcohol in Latin is "spiritus" and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: spiritus contra spiritum.

Thanking you again for your kind letter

I remain

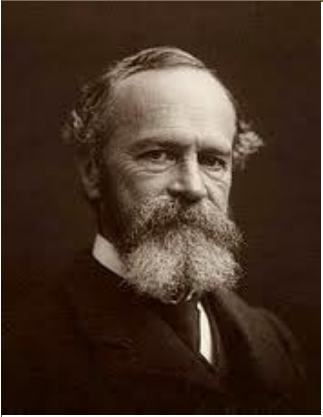
yours sincerely



¹⁾ "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." (Psalm 42,1)

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William James



William James (January 11, 1842 – August 26, 1910) was a pioneering American psychologist and philosopher who was trained as a physician. He was the first educator to offer a psychology course in the U.S. He wrote influential books on the young science of psychology, educational psychology, psychology of religious experience and mysticism, and on the philosophy of pragmatism. He was the brother of novelist Henry James and of diarist Alice James.

James interacted with a wide array of writers and scholars throughout his life, including his godfather Ralph Waldo Emerson, his godson William James Sidis, as well as Charles Sanders Peirce, Bertrand Russell, Josiah Royce, Ernst Mach, John Dewey, Macedonio Fernández, Walter Lippmann, Mark Twain, Horatio Alger, Jr., Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud.

James spent almost his entire academic career at Harvard. He was appointed instructor in physiology for the spring 1873 term, instructor in anatomy and physiology in 1873, assistant professor of psychology in 1876, assistant professor of philosophy in 1881, full professor in 1885, endowed chair in psychology in 1889, return to philosophy in 1897, and emeritus professor of philosophy in 1907.

James studied medicine, physiology, and biology, and began to teach in those subjects, but was drawn to the scientific study of the human mind at a time when psychology was constituting itself as a science. James's acquaintance with the work of figures like Hermann Helmholtz in Germany and Pierre Janet in France facilitated his introduction of courses in scientific psychology at Harvard University. He taught his first experimental psychology course at Harvard in the 1875–1876 academic year.^[5]

During his Harvard years, James joined in philosophical discussions with Charles Peirce, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Chauncey Wright that evolved into a lively group informally known as The Metaphysical Club in 1872. Louis Menand speculates that the Club provided a foundation for American intellectual thought for decades to come.

Among James's students at Harvard University were such luminaries as Boris Sidis, Theodore Roosevelt, George Santayana, W. E. B. Du Bois, G. Stanley Hall, Ralph Barton Perry, Gertrude Stein, Horace Kallen, Morris Raphael Cohen, Walter Lippmann, Alain Locke, C. I. Lewis, and Mary Whiton Calkins.

Following his January, 1907 retirement from Harvard, James continued to write and lecture, publishing *Pragmatism, A Pluralistic Universe*, and *The Meaning of Truth*.

He was one of the strongest proponents of the school of functionalism in psychology and of pragmatism in philosophy. He was a founder of the American Society for Psychical Research, as well as a champion of alternative approaches to healing. He challenged his professional colleagues not to let a narrow mindset prevent an honest appraisal of those beliefs.

James did important work in philosophy of religion. In his Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh he provided a wide-ranging account of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and interpreted them according to his pragmatic leanings. Some of the important claims he makes in this regard:

- Religious genius (experience) should be the primary topic in the study of religion, rather than religious institutions—since institutions are merely the social descendant of genius.
- The intense, even pathological varieties of experience (religious or otherwise) should be sought by psychologists, because they represent the closest thing to a microscope of the mind—that is, they show us in drastically enlarged form the normal processes of things.
- In order to usefully interpret the realm of common, shared experience and history, we must each make certain "over-beliefs" in things which, while they cannot be proven on the basis of experience, help us to live fuller and better lives.

The investigation of mystical experience was constant throughout the life of James, leading him to experiment with chloral hydrate (1870), amyl nitrite (1875), nitrous oxide (1882), and even peyote (1896). James claimed that it was only when he was under the influence of nitrous oxide that he was able to understand Hegel.^[21] He concluded that while the revelations of the mystic hold true, they hold true only for the mystic; for others, they are certainly ideas to be considered, but can hold no claim to truth without personal experience of such. For example, consider the claim to truth held by the immutable laws of physics.

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Reference to "God as We Understand Him" is an important part of the Twelve Steps, and the AA literature. This should not surprise those familiar with the Twelve Steps of the A.A. program. The first three steps read as follows:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

The central place of God in Alcoholics Anonymous is, of course, widely known. It is less well known, though, that the emphasis given to God is due in large measure to the direct influence of William James, the father of American psychology and one of our most important philosophers.

When Bill Wilson was trying to fight his way back to sobriety, he happened upon a copy of James' *Varieties of Religious Experiences*. He read the book from cover to cover and was deeply impressed by James' "great wisdom." It helped Bill to reach the turning point in his career, and initially to completely arrest his progressive illness of alcoholism. In subsequent years, the influence of James came to be felt also in the formulation of A.A.'s basic ideas.

One could well wonder what this "great wisdom" was that has been so influential in the development of Alcoholics Anonymous, especially in its fundamental dependence on God. It was James, we know, who made pragmatism a byword in American life and thought - something for which he has been praised and damned, depending on the point of view. In its worst sense, pragmatism has created the stereotype of the typical American as a time-server who wishes to get a job done by the most efficient means possible, whose norm of truth is what works, whose rule of value is what furthers his own aims. In the minds of many, pragmatism is scarcely distinguishable from naturalism or irreligion, and both have become synonyms for "Americanism."

To deal adequately with all the misconceptions in this picture would require an extended study. What is of primary concern here is that William James proposed pragmatism precisely as a means of enabling contemporary man to find God. *Varieties of Religious Experience*, published in 1902, was actually intended as a preliminary step in this direction. In it, James undertook to examine various types of religious experience in order to see if they could give evidence for a belief in the existence of God. So absorbed did he become in describing and cataloguing experiences that the psychologist in him completely overshadowed the religious philosopher and the work became a long - though rich - sourcebook for all kinds of religious experience. It was only in a hurried chapter or two at the end that he got around to asking what conclusions could be drawn regarding God's existence.

In his *Pragmatism*, published in 1907, James returned to the investigation of theism. This work, to be properly understood, must be read as the biography of a scientific man in search of God. In the late 19th century, America had reached a critical period in its intellectual development. The new scientific age had burst upon Americans with startling suddenness, and those with vision could see that they stood on the threshold of the greatest period of progress the world had ever known.

Cheering though these prospects were, there were some thinkers who feared that the coming of the scientific age would mean the end of religion and belief in God.

Of these, William James was one. He pondered deeply the question how one could be a man of science and still remain a religious man. It was in attempting to answer this question that he developed his philosophy, which has since become known as pragmatism. In the spirit of the scientific age, he proposed pragmatism as an empirical method of arriving at truth but in his own mind he was convinced that if it was properly used it would lead to a belief in the existence of God. This was a preoccupation with James for many years - briefly expressed in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and sharply delineated in *Pragmatism*.

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For James, the most convincing evidence of God's existence "lies primarily in inner personal experience," and its starting point is the sense of emptiness and frustration. As a young man, he had experienced very poor health for about five or six years, and this caused him frequent periods of depression and discouragement. About the same time, he seems to have gone through a spiritual crisis, which manifested itself in a lack of motivation and purpose. Slowly he began to realize that he needed a unifying philosophy of life.

All this was brought to a focus in the sense of incompleteness that James found in the depths of his being as he looked at the world around him. In his scientific work, he was in search of a solution to the mysteries of nature. As a man of science, he was convinced that the answers were there; otherwise the world would be irrational. In the light of this conviction, he could not believe that man was to be frustrated when it was a question of the deep anguish and longing he experienced in his search for a final completion to all his hopes and aspirations.

Here we find a far different James from the one presented by critics of pragmatism. He was an American who, even while he upheld the integrity of the scientist in weighing and judging every last bit of evidence, was religious to the very core of his being. Though remaining a scientist, this man could stand before the world as one who knew human suffering and anguish, as one whose 'spirit was open to the call from the divine. James believed in a God who was "cosmic and tragic" a God in contact with the needs and the deeply human problems of mankind. With his flair for the dramatic, he pictured God as walking through the world, suffering with those in pain and weeping with those who were reduced to tears. It is small wonder, then, that an alcoholic, face to face with despair, found kinship with James as he read in *Varieties of Religious Experience* the account of human suffering. Sorrow, disappointment, failure, physical pain, all led James to the conclusion that "natural goods perish; riches take wings; fame is a breath; love is a cheat; youth and health and pleasure vanish."

For James, human existence, even at its best, is left with an "irremediable sense of precariousness"; it is a "bell with a crack."

Perhaps more than most others, Bill W. felt the frustration and anguish consequent upon human weakness and misery. Hence he took seriously James' observation that truly transforming spiritual experiences are nearly always founded on calamity and collapse. Following through on this lesson learned from *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Bill W. writes:

"Complete hopelessness and deflation at depth were almost always required to make the recipient of spiritual experiences ready. The significance of all this burst upon me. Deflation at depth, yes, that was it. Exactly that had happened to me."

For Bill W. and others like him, alcoholism was the starting point on the way to God and to sobriety. Their affliction was not so much the cause of their turn to God as its occasion. For the possibility that the divine existed had occurred to them before, but now they felt they could no longer postpone or evade the question. Bill states: "We had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is, or He isn't. What was our choice to be?"

Faced with this issue, alcoholics such as these come to the conviction that the world is not a cipher, aimlessly rushing nowhere, that human existence at its roots is not meaningless or absurd. They echo James' statement that sadness lies at the heart of every philosophy that tries to exclude God. If human life is to have any meaning at all, they can only conceive it as completed by a God who has in His hands the direction of the universe and the final destiny of mankind.

For an alcoholic, the move toward God is not an escape from responsibility, a concession to weakness, an excuse

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for laziness.

According to Bill: "We can laugh at those who think spirituality the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. And men of faith have courage. They trust their God. We never apologize for God. Instead we let Him demonstrate, through us, what He can do."

The moment the alcoholic turns to God, he engages in the life-and-death struggle back to sobriety, which will mean daily sacrifice and self-denial. It will bring a change not only in his whole way of thinking but also in many aspects of his daily life.

He will have to take up again his personal and family obligations. More than that, it will mean assuming a special responsibility for his fellow man, for an important part of the A.A. program is Step Twelve, which is "to carry this message to alcoholics." Each member becomes an apostle in the original meaning of the word: one sent to others on a mission of salvation.

In this sense, the acceptance of God is, for an alcoholic, only the beginning. And yet it is everything, for it is God who integrates every aspect of his life - his joys and sorrows, hopes and ambitions - and gives them meaning and direction. And this is authentically Jamesian. In the words of Ralph Barton Perry, James' faith is both a "comforting faith" and a "fighting faith."

The first rises out of weakness and gives refuge and security.

The second springs from strength and enables the religious man to fight on with courage, hope and joy even in the face of danger and uncertainty.

This is the way such an alcoholic seeks to solve the burden of misery and sorrow that his addiction brings. He proposes it not as the way, but as a way to God. In fact, A.A. does not even require its members to accept theism if they do not wish to do so. This point had to be carefully hammered out in the early stages of the A.A. program. There were some who objected to making the acceptance of a personal God an essential condition for membership. It was finally agreed that the members could choose a "power greater than ourselves," even if A.A. itself was this "higher power."

Most alcoholics, however, come to believe in and depend on a Higher Power, which they call God, even though each one is free to decide for himself what God will mean to him. In almost every case, full recovery from alcoholism has depended on this all-important faith. God "as we understood Him" has become the cornerstone of the whole movement. Usually the alcoholic comes to believe in a personal God who is deeply concerned with the needs and the aspirations of men.

Were William James alive today, he would have understood and appreciated the journey that Alcoholics Anonymous has taken in applying pragmatism to God "as we understood Him" in an effort to lift people out of their "sick-minded soul" for James had said that, "where God is, tragedy is only provisional and partial, and shipwreck and dissolution are not the absolutely final things."

Both William James and Alcoholics Anonymous are convinced that this fact is due not to God alone, but also to what God can do through us.

Bill W. and Dr. Bob

Pre-Show Discussion Questions

WRITE & DISCUSS

1. We live in a society that tends to do everything to excess, whether it's drinking, eating, gambling, playing video games, you name it. What is it about our culture that promotes and supports this excessive behavior? What kinds of measures do you think we can take to support moderation rather than excess?
2. Bill Wilson wholeheartedly agreed with the works of renowned psychologist Dr. Carl Jung, and both he and Dr. Bob Smith had been reading the works of William James, who influenced them greatly as well. Is there an author or a researcher today whose views and philosophies influence you? In seeking a path through life, or some rules to live by, who would you look to as a model and why?
3. Through the Twelve Steps, people have given themselves over to God "*as we understood Him.*" Why do you think the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous felt it was important to qualify a relationship with God with the phrase "*as we understood Him?*" Would you find that phrase helpful if you felt a need to follow a Twelve Step model? Why or why not?
4. In any situation where addiction is involved (to alcohol, drugs, or other destructive behaviors), there is, typically, another person or people who are co-dependent, who enable the behavior to continue. How important do you think it is for a co-dependent person to work on their behavior when an addict is working on their own recovery? Explain.
5. In addition to Twelve Step programs (like Alcoholics Anonymous) that exist for alcoholics and addicts, there are programs like Al-Anon and Al-Ateen, that exist for family members of addicts. Why do you think it is important that these groups exist? What might they have to offer the families of those who have problems with addiction?
6. We all have things that we enjoy — and that we sometimes enjoy to excess. How do you know when your over-indulgence in something crosses the line and becomes unhealthy, even addictive? Do you have any kind of signal or failsafe that you set for yourself to prevent yourself from crossing that line? Or a support system of people to recognize the signs of problems or help you if you do (or do friends and family — possibly unknowingly — encourage or enable your over-indulgence)?

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Post-Show Discussion Questions

WRITE & DISCUSS

1. The prologue and the epilogue of the play are set up with Bill W. and Dr. Bob appearing as speakers at (two separate) A.A. meetings. Why do you think the playwrights chose to bookend the script this way? In what ways might it make the play more accessible to audience members who are in recovery? In what ways might it be illuminating to audience members who are not in recovery?
2. Both Bill W. and Dr. Bob had tried, on numerous occasions, and failed, to become clean and maintain their sobriety. Then they each had a convergence of events, including “vital spiritual experiences” and, most importantly, the opportunity to speak with another alcoholic about their experiences. What was it about this new opportunity that changed everything for them? Why do you think it’s important for alcoholics/addicts to have other alcoholics/ addicts with whom they speak and from whom they gain support? What’s different about that from talking to someone who hasn’t been an addict?
3. Lois Wilson and Anne Smith loved their husbands and wanted to help and support them but, unwittingly, exhibited some co-dependent behaviors. What actions did you see them take that you might be able to identify as co-dependent? How might they have handled things differently to greater effect?
4. Although Al-Anon was not formally/officially formed until fifteen years after Bill W. and Dr. Bob created Alcoholics Anonymous, the roots of it were right there from the beginning — you can see, in the play, what was, essentially, the first Al-Anon meeting when Anne, Lois and Henrietta Dotson sit down on the back porch to talk. Why was this an important moment in the play?
5. Dr. Bob cautions Bill W. that they shouldn’t “louse this thing up” — that they need to “keep it simple.” What do you think he means by that and why is it so important to what A.A. has become?
6. In the play, the characters talk about how Prohibition only made things worse (and a recent documentary about Prohibition by Ken Burns shows that more people had drinking problems with the advent of Prohibition than had before). Why doesn’t it work to simply outlaw alcohol, or to (attempt to) deny people access to it? In what ways does it make things worse for alcoholics?

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Further Research

Alcoholics Anonymous

<http://silkworth.net/aa/12steps.html>
<http://www.aa.org/?Media=PlayFlash>

Why Alcohol is Addictive

http://www.ehow.com/facts_5002058_what-makes-alcohol-addictive.html
<http://www.michaelshouse.com/alcohol-treatment/why-is-alcohol-so-addictive/>
http://aa.org/en_pdfs/smf-121_en.pdf

<http://www.michaelshouse.com/alcohol-treatment/alcohol-treatment-myths-facts/>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/13/alcohol-addictive-endorphins- n_1202406.html

Bill W

<http://williamborchert.com/photos.html>
<http://www.theearlydaysofaa.com/speakers.html>
<http://www.texasdistrict5.com/history-in-photos.htm>

William James and Alcoholics Anonymous

<http://www.idaa.org/2010/cme/cme-day-2.pdf>

Oxford Group

http://silkworth.net/aahistory/oxford_group_connection1.html
<http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/patton-oxford.shtml>

Books

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