

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 33, NO. 2

FEB 2009

The Practice of Sobriety

“Just tell me how and I’ll do it!”

The biggest problem I had with the program at first was: *How? How* do we turn our will and our lives over? *How* do we come to believe? *How* do I make an inventory? And so forth through most of the Steps. “Please tell me *how* do I go about improving my conscious contact, conquering resentments, getting humility...” I asked.

Loud and long, I complained, “It’s easy to tell a new fellow to do what the Steps suggest, but that’s like telling a drowning man, ‘Swim!’ Just tell me *how*, and I’ll do it!” They listened (I thought), or maybe they tuned me out. But they did encourage me to keep working the program.

Finally, I began to note the frequency of the word “practice.” It was “practice these principles,” practice tolerance, practice the Steps, and on and on until, out of curiosity, I checked the meaning of “practice” and found one definition was “perform” and another was “do repeatedly for proficiency.”

Obviously, the definition “perform” was not meant for me, for I couldn’t perform any of the suggestions at first, including avoiding the first drink. I had to learn to stay away from the old hangouts and my lushy friends, as well as pass the package store without hesitating.

Only in retrospect did I realize that even then I was *practicing* sobriety. At the time, I only knew that I was trying. But as failure and discouragement began to set in, I realized that success, if it was to come at all, would come only through practice—trial and error; as practice brings success in other fields, so here; if I practiced seriously and honestly long enough, I could not fail.

The Third Step is a case in point. When I first became aware of its power, I said “Aha! Finally, the secret of *how* to live,” and couldn’t wait for the meeting to end so that I could get home and on my knees and tell my Higher Power, “Take over, God.” I did, and slept with a new sense of peace. But the next morning, I took it all back and then, that night, turned it over again. So it went, like a shuttlecock between God and me. I didn’t know that I was practicing and am grateful now that he gave me the grace to keep on until I achieved a degree of proficiency. After thirty-some years, however, I’m still practicing—even veterans need practice.

It has been the same with nearly everything the program offers. I thought resentments would never leave me alone, but where I first clutched them for days, they have been whittled down little by little, until they are now usually no more than an involuntary reaction, quickly dispelled.

My first inventories were ridiculous, but they gradually became more honest and sincere. I began to have more and more faith in practice. With the help of my Higher Power, I have no doubt that, given enough time, the promises in the Big Book will all be fulfilled.

Often, new members expect to arrive quickly at the serenity and happiness the long-timers have. It is there, but the path is long; it takes time and effort. This is good, for without practice we would never understand the struggle nor know the joy of victory that fits us to guide those who follow, just as did our founders.

R. T.

Comer, Georgia

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

37th Annual ACYPAA

March 12 - 15, 2009
Irvine, CA
Info: 949-230-9259
Website: www.acypaa2009.org

32nd Annual San Diego Spring Round Up

April 9 - 12, 2009
San Diego, CA
Registration Info: 760-583-1658
Website: www.SanDiegoSpringRoundUp.com

28th Annual Hospital and Institution Conference

April 24 - 26, 2009
Orange, CA
Registration Info: 714-593-0469
Website: www.socalhandi.org

25th Tri-State Round-Up

May 14 - 17, 2009
Laughlin, NV
Registration Info: 928-753-6035
Website: www.TriState-Roundup.com

Things We Cannot Change...

Frank B. — Chandler Lodge — 15 Years

James L. — Valley Club

Obviously, the staff of Valley Central Office cannot know all the members of the local fellowship. If you have knowledge of the passing of one of our members, please notify us here at Central Office during literature sales hours or mail us the obituary from the local newspaper. You can also email us at sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net.

Service Committee Schedule

- Feb. 16, 2009 **SFV H&I
THIRD MONDAY**
8PM Business Meeting
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
5657 Lindley Ave.

- Mar. 2, 2009 **G.S. District #11
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- Mar. 2, 2009 **G.S. District #16
SECOND MONDAY**
6:15PM meeting
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- Mar. 2, 2009 **G.S. District #17
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- Mar. 3, 2009 **G.S. District #2
FIRST TUESDAY**
5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- Mar. 4, 2009 **G.S. District #1
FIRST WEDNESDAY**
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- Mar. 4, 2009 **SFV Board of Directors**
6:30PM, Central Office

- Mar. 14, 2009 **G.S. District #7
SECOND SATURDAY**
9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

- Mar. 9, 2009 **SFV Intergroup
SECOND MONDAY**
6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting
St. Innocents Church
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

To All Meeting Secretaries

Help us keep your meeting information up to date.

If your meeting has changed its Location, Time of Meeting, Meeting Name or Type of Meeting, please update this information *as soon as possible* with your Central Office. Updates can be completed by mail or in person during Literature Sales Hours at San Fernando Valley Central Office. Our address is listed on the back cover of this newsletter. Meeting updates *must* be completed in writing. Any questions can be answered by calling your Central Office at (818) 988-3001 and asking for a staff member.

Valley Events

TO FIND OUT WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON
YOU CAN:

COME TO CENTRAL OFFICE

CALL US AT 818-988-3001

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Opportunities for Service

Your Central Office needs
telephone volunteers for all shifts,
especially the Overnight (12 Midnight - 9 AM) shift.

If you have one year or more of continuous sobriety, we invite you to join us and help your fellow alcoholics. You can sign up in the office or online at <http://www.sfvaa.org/involve.html>.

Service Opportunities & News

Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

Provides information to the general public about what A.A. does and does not do. Could always use volunteers, especially young people and Spanish speaking A.A.'s for health fairs and to speak at various schools and businesses. Contact Central Office (818) 988-3001.

HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the third Monday of each month 8:00 pm (Get Acquainted Workshop, 7:00 pm) at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. For more information, contact Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY INTERGROUP -

Elected Intergroup representatives maintain and develop policies for Central Office, and inform other IG Reps about Alkathons, fund raisers, etc. Meets second Monday, monthly, St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Orientation 6:30 pm, Meeting at 7:00 pm. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2010 Convention. The Committee meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month (except February and March); 7 pm at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA.

Central Office News

San Fernando Valley Central Office is On the Web

The SFV Central Office website is now available for Internet browsers. On the website, you can find a map to our office in Van Nuys, a listing of upcoming events in the Valley, service organization information and links to other cool A.A. websites. Our meeting schedule is also accessible on the website. Meetings are listed by day, Sunday through Saturday.

Check it out: <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Do you have an article for the Recovery Times?

Email it to us at: sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting January 12, 2009

Josh S. Chairperson – Meeting opened at 7:00 PM
Treasurer's Report: See Insert
*Service Committee information - see page 2 and 3
of the Recovery Times for more information*
Old Business: None.
New Business: None
Birthdays: Laurie - 1 yr.

Motion to adjourn 7:30 PM
*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes
for January is available at Central Office
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*

*These minutes are pending approval on
February 9, 2009*

Next Meeting - February 9, 2009

*Prepared and submitted by:
Dawn H., Recording Secretary*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

January 2009

David M. 4 years

Laura B. 9 years

Ken B. 24 years

**Reseda Big Book Study
and Disc'n. a number of years**

Your Birthday Gift to Central Office

Many A.A. members share their birthdays with those who need the same help and opportunity that A.A. gave to them.

By sending a donation to Central Office you share your birthday with Recovery Times readers. Send a dollar (\$1.00) a year - or \$1.00 for each year of your sobriety - or send as much as you wish to give to celebrate your birthday. The amount doesn't matter - it's the "counting" that counts.

May your special day be filled with joy from morning until night, and may the "24's" that lie ahead be especially glad and bright.

My Initiation Fee

WHEN I first contacted Alcoholics Anonymous, I was told there were no dues, but that the initiation fee was very high. I was told also that entrance into the membership was bona-fide evidence that the fee had been paid, but never in full.

From the first black-out, at age fifteen, at a Sunday School party in the basement of the Methodist Church in my home town in Texas, to the last writhing sickness in a hotel room in Iowa, thirty-seven years later, I paid the initiation fee!

From positions that ranked high in financial potential to the lowliest menial chores at subsistence wages, I paid my initiation. Along a path of broken dreams, of broken promises, of broken bones and broken hearts, the payment has been collected, but never in full.

Recently, at a meeting in a town in Eastern Iowa, I was introduced to a young man in his thirties who, they said, had had thirty-six jobs. Without thinking, and not meaning to be facetious or anything of a belittling nature, I asked "What year?" To me, this question did not seem ill put, as in some years of my drinking career I had lived in that many towns! Anything that wouldn't fit into a battered suitcase was dead weight, so away it went, either to a pawn broker, or as security to a bootlegger for another bottle.

I fled to escape convention and the society that did not understand a man of my qualifications. I was quick to anger, and yet so much of a coward that I would fight to keep people from knowing just how cowardly I was. A great man with words, a whip with a quip! I was cutting, slashing and bantering at a society that I used to the best of my ability, and despised with all of my heart. The do-gooders, the sob-sisters, the holy Joe's and the social workers—all were representatives of an egghead cult that were, of necessity, meant to be listened to then quickly fleeced to finance another spree.

The cunning that is developed over a period of years makes us readily adaptable to any situation: an ingratiating manner, a miraculously thin coat of veneer that, when punctured, explodes in bitterness and wrath; tears and penitence, or mad, uncontrolled blind flight to a new mark, a new Elysian field, where the grass is greener or the pickings easier; the lies, the deceit, the promises made glibly without thought of any fulfillment. These are but a few of the receipts for partial payment on our initiation fee, and I have made them all.

Then there is the sickening fright that enters into a man's soul when he comes to the realization that he must turn to a Higher Power for help, when no other help is available. For it is against this Higher Power that we have directed our satire, sarcasm, sacrilege, and derision (yea, brother, cast your bread upon the waters, and after many days it will return to you, soggy).

Here, I believe, is the greatest payment of all, when we realize that only through Him, whom we have ridiculed, chastised and upbraided, can we return to sanity of mind and some sort of peace of heart and serenity of soul.

Yes, this is the greatest payment, because the remorse and penitence-strewn field over which we must cross, on our knees, to reach a goal of deep humility, is covered with the jagged fragments of broken promises, lies, deceit and bleeding hearts.

This payment, when extracted, causes the soul to writhe as did the stomach, when we retched in vain to rid our body of the poison within. Yes, our soul must be given an antidote, an emetic of pure humility in copious quantities, until all of the despair, dishonor, dissolution and debasement have been washed from the most remote crevice. Then, and only then, can the sunshine of the love of God and man enter in, and smooth on the healing analgesic: the peace that passes all understanding, the blessed assurance that "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

As I twisted in near-screaming fear at the hallucinations created by a conscience-ridden brain, little did I dream that this peace would ever come to me! My only prayer at this time was, "Oh, God, let me die, or please give me the courage for self-destruction."

Payments on an initiation fee? Yea, verily, I have made a million of them, and yet I am still making them. Probably I shall always make them, as, at each turn of the road to rehabilitation, I come upon some spectre of the wasted years which invokes again a prayer of penitence; or as I am faced with the problem of some fellow sufferer who has yet to free himself from the compulsion of self-imposed torture.

Borrow naught from tomorrow; loan nothing to yesterday.

When I consider the price that I have paid for my initiation and the feeling comes to me that I have been assigned the role of fate's whipping boy, when it occurs to me that my bonuses and rewards for my sobriety are coming a little too slow, I run, not walk, to the nearest phone or to my car, and hie myself thither to console some suffering soul who is not quite so far over in his payment book on the initiation fee into AA. Then, when I count my blessings instead of comparing them, I can say like Pippa, in passing, "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world."

*D. L. C.
Cedar Falls, Iowa*

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The First Step Has Become a “Must”

We say, or used to say, there are no “musts” in A.A. That was true when the book was written because at that time A.A. was in the formative stage and everything was really trial and error. There was no substantial proof that A.A. would work in more than a few cases. The major portion of A.A. is still trial and error and I hope it will always remain that way because we are dealing with individuals and each case differs.

But the fact remains that, although each case differs, in the final analysis the basic starting point is the same. Each individual finally has to admit that “he is powerless over alcohol and that his life is unmanageable”; therefore I believe that the First Step in the program of A.A. has passed the trial and error stage and that we have come to the place where we can and should say that the alcoholic must swallow that First Step hook, line and sinker. He must chew it up and digest it so thoroughly that it is absorbed into his system and becomes a living part of him. If necessary he could and should develop as much of an obsession not to drink as he used to have to take a drink. His “no thank you” must become as automatic a thing to him as his former “don’t mind if I do” answer to an invitation or urge to drink.

That First Step is the keystone of the arch, the hub of the wheel or the cornerstone of any structure he wishes to build out of his remaining life. The whole A.A. program, for the alcoholic, revolves around it or is based on it. There is no use in continuing the treatment for any disease until the patient has arrived at a decision that he has the disease he is being treated

for, because as long as he is not thoroughly convinced that he has the disease he will not follow through on the doctor’s orders. And when he doesn’t follow the doctor’s orders he has a relapse or recurrence of the disease.

The first step in the diagnosis of his case is for him to really make a decision that he is an alcoholic and that his life is unmanageable. Then he is ready for the treatment to take effect.

The treatment for the alcoholic is the balance of the program of A.A., the other 11 Steps. And the best part of it is that the balance of the program, although it comes slow to most of us, becomes a pleasure and a joy to try and live by.

I, for one, am thankful that I didn’t have any sudden spiritual awakening, because if it had been too easy at the start I probably would have done the same thing I had always done before, lost interest or said, “This is a cinch. All I have to do is not drink.” If that had happened I would have missed the boat and by this time I would have been drowned and forgotten.

So I say that we have come to the place in A.A. where we should tell the new man that he must get that First Step and get it good. The evidence is all in favor of that statement and conclusion.

J.F.H.

Linda Vista, California

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*Co-founder
Quotes*

Bill W.

Mental and emotional difficulties are sometimes very hard to take while we are trying to maintain sobriety. Yet we do see, in the long run, that transcendence over such problems is the real test of the A.A. way of living. Adversity gives us more opportunity to grow than does comfort or success.

*Reprinted from As Bill Sees It, page 234,
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Tradition Five: What A Group “Ought” To Be

An AA says we can't transmit what we don't have

Tradition Five: Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

The first thing Tradition Five tells us is what a group is, or at least “ought to be.”

We are not a sociological entity, although sociologists find us fascinating. We are not a therapy group, although remarkable healing takes place among us. And we are not a religion, even though some people want to see us as such.

We are a spiritual entity, or at least “ought to be.”

To me, that means that, although we are not saints, we “ought to” strive for spiritual progress. We follow a spiritual path laid out for us by Bill, Bob, and the first one hundred members of Alcoholics Anonymous. That spiritual path consists of the Twelve Steps, and by later development, the Twelve Traditions. They are suggestions only, but very firm suggestions—norms for our spiritual progress. We are a Fellowship of men and women who ought to come together as a spiritual entity.

We deal with two things here: our being and our doing. Clearly, what we are is going to have a lot to do with what

we do. And what we do is going to have a strong influence on what we are.

We shake our heads at the “Two-Steppers” who, still on the First Step, take it upon themselves to run around “Twelfth-Stepping” whomever they can corner. We know they have not acquired a solid enough foundation in AA spirituality to pass it on to others. They forget the old saying: *nemo dat quod non habet* (No one can give what he doesn't have). Soon, without the gratification of instant success, discouragement sets in. The Two-Stepper must learn to be spiritual first, or give in to discouragement and quit AA.

Can this happen to a group? I think it can. When individuals in a group neglect the spiritual program of Alcoholics Anonymous and come to the meetings as if they were “fellowship” and nothing more; or when they dilute the meeting to focus on other things, or disparage spirituality, thinking it's the intrusion of religion; then, as a group, they stop being a spiritual entity. The group gets its spirituality from its members.

What does this mean to me personally? It means that my AA spirituality is the very foundation of my sobriety. The group will be as spiritual as its members are spiritual.

continued →

Will You Fire Me?

Sponsorship

When I first became sober, I thought I was one of those rare people in AA that wouldn't need a sponsor. I also came to think that if I asked someone to sponsor me, I'd be told no. I developed a terrible fear of rejection. So I held on by my fingernails for seven months. At this time, I felt like I was going crazy. I wasn't working any sort of a program. I knew that if I was to stay sober, I would have to try this sponsor thing.

The first person I asked did just what I'd feared—he rejected me. It hurt to be rejected, but I knew I wanted to stay sober. I only knew two things about the next person I asked—his name and that I'd seen him pick up a chip for five years of sobriety. He accepted me and started me off on the basics of an AA program. He told me read the Big Book to page 164, then told me to read this a second time, and we'd talk about it. He also had me read a daily devotion book and pray each day to a Higher Power. The last thing

he said was to call him every day if I wanted him to sponsor me. I didn't want to do this at the age of fifty-two, but I told him yes, and I did.

One day I called him seven times. I asked him if I called again that day, would he fire me. He laughed and said no. He said I was helping him. I didn't understand this at the time. I know now that he needed me. I'm now four years sober in this God-given miracle of AA, and I still have this loving sponsor. He guides me with his gentle but firm hand. I know that I couldn't have stayed sober without this man. I thank the God of my understanding for him. If you don't have a sponsor, I strongly suggest you get one. This disease of alcoholism kills.

Joe A.

Lexington, South Carolina

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Tradition Five: What A Group "Ought" To Be

continued

So my spiritual condition strengthens or weakens the spirituality of the group. Therefore, it increases or lessens our chances for survival as a group, and our chances for sobriety as individuals in the group.

Besides taking good care of my own spirituality, I try to encourage activity that might strengthen the spirituality of the group, such as Twelfth Step workshops. Weekend events

can become very popular and even traditional occasions in the life of the group. Whatever strengthens the spirituality of the group strengthens my spirituality, and vice versa. Whatever does that, increases my chances of staying sober, and at the same time, helps me and the group to remain focused on our primary purpose.

Anonymous

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Humor from the Grapevine

Two elderly ladies had been friends for many decades. Although they once tore up the town, drinking and carousing, they now met only a few times a week for a quiet card game.

One day, while playing cards, one looked at the other and said, "Now don't get mad at me. I know we've been friends for a long time, but I can't think of your name! I've thought and thought, but I just can't remember it. Please tell me what your name is."

Her friend glared at her for at least three minutes. Finally she said, "How soon do you need to know?"

« « « » » »

A drunk goes to the pub and orders, "A glass of the best 'less,' please."

"'Less?'" says the bartender. "I've never heard of it. What is it? Beer? Whiskey?"

"Well, I'm not sure," answers the drunk, "but the doctor recommended it—he said I should drink 'less'."

« « « » » »

An old drunk, out fishing one day, stumbled across a talking frog.

The frog said, "I'll turn into a ravishing beauty and fulfill your every desire, if only you'll kiss me." The fisherman scooped up the frog and put it in his pocket.

Later on, at a bar, he pulled out the frog and set it next to his beer. The bartender overheard the frog repeat the offer. Amazed, he asked the drunk, what he was waiting for.

The old alkie replied, "At my age, I'd rather have a talking frog."

« « « » » »

A doctor advertises brain transplants. A man goes to see what kinds of brains he has to offer. The doctor says, "I have a lawyer's brain for \$ 100,000; a doctor's brain for \$200,000; and an alcoholic's brain for \$500,000."

The fellow asks, "What makes the alcoholic's brain cost so much?"

The doctor replies, "Look at it! It's like new, hardly used."

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Van Nuys, CA 91405

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