

Recovery Times

New Meeting Directory SOON!!
Tell us your changes NOW!!

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 33, NO. 8 AUG 2009

What We Could Never Do

The central fact of our lives today is the absolute certainty that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could never do by ourselves.—Alcoholics Anonymous

These words from the Big Book are awfully tough for an atheist to swallow. That so-called “central fact” about a Creator is no part of my life. And anyway, even if there were a Creator, what could he do for me that I cannot do for myself? I’m the one who has to do the Steps and make amends. I’m the one who must go to meetings and do service work. What is it that I cannot do that I need a Creator to do for me?

After some months in AA, I became frustrated when I heard people in meetings talk about God doing for them what they could not do for themselves. One woman said she is now a good, loving mother for her children. She said there was no way she could have accomplished that herself. She knew because she had tried and failed for years previously. Clearly God was accomplishing for her what she could not do by herself, she concluded.

At first, this caused me to bristle. She was skipping over something important. At some earlier time, she could not take care of her children properly. Now she could. So she concluded that something miraculous had occurred. But in fact, she had learned to take care of her children in the intervening time. She was deluding herself with false modesty, crediting God with what she was doing herself; or conversely, crediting herself, by saying that what she was doing couldn’t be done except by God.

But she started me thinking. When I thought about myself, I began to see that perhaps there was something to all this. Then there came a breakthrough thought. For me, AA has been like my high school typing class. Before I took the class, I could not type—no way, no how. I could hunt and peck, but I had no inkling of the true technique of typing. In theory, it is possible that I could have taught myself how to type by reading books or watching videotapes. But in fact, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I could never have mustered the self-motivation to learn typing on my own.

However, in typing class, there was a teacher who cared

about what I was doing. She monitored my progress on a daily basis. And there were other students in the class, so we competed to be the best at typing. We were tested and graded on our work. With all this motivation, I enthusiastically learned how to type over the course of the year. Now I can reel off pages of print effortlessly.

If I compare the time before I took that class to the present, I may be tempted to conclude that a miracle occurred. Since I couldn’t do it before and now I can, clearly I am not the one doing the typing. God must be doing it for me, since I can’t be doing it myself.

This conclusion is evidently ridiculous. But the example contains a grain of truth. The typing class did not do the work. It did not move my fingers on the keyboard, or put in the hours of practice necessary to learn typing. I did all that myself. Yet I could never have brought myself to do that work without the typing class. The teacher, the tests, the other students, and the report card each played a role in teaching me to type. The class did for me what I could not do for myself: It motivated me to do the work to learn to type.

AA has been a similar experience for me. I have had to do all the work myself. I have had to work the Twelve Steps; I have had to attend meetings; I have had to make coffee, secretary meetings, and serve as GSR for my home group; I have had to call my sponsor every day; and I have had to read AA literature on a daily basis. No one has done that for me. And yet I could never, I would never, have done any of this work without AA to motivate me. There was nothing magic, paranormal, or supernatural about this “miraculous” experience. The other AA members, my sponsor, and AA as a whole have done for me what I could not do for myself: They have motivated me and given me confidence to do the work necessary to recover from alcoholism.

The central fact of my life today is the absolute certainty that AA has entered into my heart and life in a way which is indeed exceptional. It has commenced to accomplish those things for me which I could never do by myself. AA as a whole is my Higher Power.

Gabriela R., Seattle, Washington

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

42nd Annual District 22 Convention
 August 28 - 30, 2009
 San Luis Obispo, CA
 Info: Gloria G. 805-471-2790
 Website: www.sloaa.org

34th Annual Great Outdoor Beaver Meeting
 September 3 - 6, 2009
 Beaver, UT
 Info: Joe C. 213-792-7715
 Website: www.greatoutdoorbeavermeeting.com

31st Annual Ventura County AA Convention
 September 11 - 13, 2009
 Westlake, CA
 Email: info@vcaac.org
 Website: www.vcaac.org

13th Annual National AA Archives Workshop
 September 24 - 27, 2009
 Woodland Hills, CA
 Info: George R. 818-378-4186, Mike S. 805-338-5140
 Email: NAAAW09@aol.com,
 aaarchivesmike@sbcglobal.net
 Website: www.aanationalarchivesworkshop.com

Valley Events

Central Office will be
CLOSED

for literature sales on
Monday, September 7, 2009
 for the Labor Day Holiday. We will re-open
 on Tuesday Sept. 8th from 9AM - 6PM.

Things We Cannot Change...

Mark V. — 6 Years

Jess G. — 27 Years

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

Aug. 17, 2009 **SFV H&I**
THIRD MONDAY
 8PM Business Meeting
 7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
 5657 Lindley Ave.

Sep. 7, 2009 **G.S. District #11**
FIRST MONDAY
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 315 W. Vine St., Glendale

Sep. 7, 2009 **G.S. District #16**
FIRST MONDAY
 6:15PM meeting
 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

Sep. 7, 2009 **G.S. District #17**
FIRST MONDAY
 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

Sep. 1, 2009 **G.S. District #2**
FIRST TUESDAY
 5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

Sep. 2, 2009 **G.S. District #1**
FIRST WEDNESDAY
 6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

Sep. 9, 2009 **SFV Board of Directors**
 6:30PM, Central Office

Sep. 12, 2009 **G.S. District #7**
SECOND SATURDAY
 9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club
 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

Sep. 14, 2009 **SFV Intergroup**
SECOND MONDAY
 6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting
 St. Innocents Church
 5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

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>.

New Meeting Directory SOON!! Tell us your changes NOW!!

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.

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 July 13, 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: Joel - 3 yrs, Derek - 8 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:25 PM
*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes
for June is available at Central Office
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*

*These minutes are pending approval on
August 10, 2009*

Next Meeting - August 10, 2009

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

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

July 2009

Dusty U.	5 years
Paul D.	16 years
Olivia C.	19 years
Linda S.	24 years
Reseda BB Study & Disc.	2 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.

Using Tradition Three within the AA Fellowship

Is it possible to help someone who doesn't have a problem with alcohol?

Tradition Three: The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking

Using Tradition Three in all areas of my life:

Question: What do these things have in common?

1. My boss is demanding and blames me for his mistakes. And he doesn't appreciate me.
2. The dog sheds all over the house and won't sleep through the night.
3. I sometimes think I won't be able to make enough money and I'll have to move.
4. My sweetheart asks me too many questions!
5. In meetings, every time you-know-who shares, she/he talks on and on.

Answer: They all bug the heck out of me!

"What would the Master do?" asks one of the elders in the Tradition Three story in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. This Tradition teaches me to ask God for guidance. My sponsor said this also guides me to the passage on Step Ten in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, which suggests when I am agitated or disturbed, that I pause and then ask for guidance.

I try to do that. Pausing carries me a long way, asking God for guidance, even further. Sometimes, I do not make things worse. And, for me, this is a great thing.

Love, acceptance, and tolerance are the guiding principles of this Tradition.

Using Tradition Three within the AA Fellowship:

Recently, one of my sister-sponsees told me that she found herself in the strange position of sponsoring a woman who had drunk only once in her life. I have had this same kind of sponsorship experience a number of times in the past couple of years.

I was taught that someone is a member of AA when they choose to be. My experience had been that sometimes newcomers to AA did not acknowledge or really know that they were alcoholics but came to an AA meeting for other reasons. As the fog lifted, they each came to say, "Yes, I too am an alcoholic." I never pushed anyone to admit she was an alcoholic.

But more recently, I have found myself sponsoring people who said they had never drunk. This was not a case of them

eventually seeing, as things became more clear, the impact that drinking had their lives. They had never been in any trouble with their drinking. One had never drunk at all. It was weird. I actually asked my sponsor, "How do I sponsor someone who doesn't have a problem with alcohol?" The answer: I cannot.

I encouraged these women to get help in other places, from people qualified to help them with their specific problems. To have to say to someone: "Alcoholics Anonymous is for people who have a drinking problem" felt strange. You'd think that would be obvious.

We learn in Tradition Three that we must be inclusive, barring no one who is an alcoholic from membership. As the Third Tradition essay in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* says, "We aren't a bit afraid you'll harm us, never mind how twisted or violent you may be." Rules for membership do not work and go against the principles of Tradition Three. But Alcoholics Anonymous is not a catch-all, the solution for everything.

I thought this was really interesting. Regarding problems other than alcohol, the pamphlet *Information on Alcoholics Anonymous* published by AA World Services says: "Alcoholism and drug addiction are often referred to as 'substance abuse' or 'chemical dependency.' Alcoholics and nonalcoholics are, therefore, sometimes introduced to AA and encouraged to attend AA meetings. Anyone may attend open AA meetings. But only those with a *drinking* problem may attend *closed* meetings or become AA members. People with problems other than alcoholism are eligible for AA membership *only* if they have a drinking problem."

Dr. Vincent Dole, a pioneer in methadone treatment for heroin addicts and for several years a former trustee on the General Service Board of AA, made the following statement: "The source of strength in AA is its single-mindedness. The mission of AA is to help alcoholics. AA limits what it is demanding of itself and its associates, and its success lies in its limited target. To believe that the process that is successful in one line guarantees success for another would be a very serious mistake."

Is a drug a drug? Yes. And a fruit is a fruit. But as one much-loved old-timer used to say, "An apple isn't an orange."

Linda W.

Libertyville, Illinois

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Do I Have Problems?

*The red carpet's out for the newcomer. What's out for the old-timer?
Well, now...*

In November of this year, God willing the cork stays in, I'll celebrate my twenty-second anniversary in AA.

Several years ago, while going through a difficult period (perhaps the most difficult in my AA life), I ran into a young-timer who also was beset with problems. At first she stood in awe of me as a hallowed creature who, because I was an old-timer, had been miraculously released from any capacity for suffering. Later on, she got around to unburdening herself. She said to me, "It's okay for you, you've got it made. What problem could you possibly have?" I adjusted my halo and said nothing.

I find this kind of thinking quite prevalent in groups, and I feel that in many ways the old-timer is misunderstood. We're bleeding deacons, throw our weight around, want to run the show, impose our views on others, forget the days when we were new, ad infinitum. Assuredly, there is a certain percentage of old-timers who behave this way, but we should try to understand them, too—perhaps their egos were too badly mutilated ever to be patched up again. But it seems to me it would belie the effectiveness and workability of the program if the majority were guilty.

The red carpet is rolled out for the newcomer and the struggling slippee (and let's never change that), but the old-timer is relegated to a back seat to bask in his own glory. The old-timer is often regarded, albeit affectionately, as a square, an old fuddy-duddy with outdated ideas, very much as a teenager regards his forty- or fifty-year-old parents. We understand this, but we have not only the right but the obligation

to speak the truth as we have learned it. We, too, have felt the sting of the chastening rod and have rebelled. We, too, had to learn that group welfare and group conscience must come before our own ego satisfaction. We, too, had to learn that grow we must, for growth is peace.

The old-timer, to go on with my lament, enjoys a sort of status in AA, but I'm betting that most of us would rather be just one of the gang. (Can't we please join AA?) The old-timer must play a role which can be demanding and frightening. He must personify the program at its highest level, have the answer to every question, and have achieved total self-mastery—whatever that is. And he is not free to throw out a problem at the discussion table, for he has none. A big order for an ex-drunk, a very human, very fallible, and often very frightened ex-drunk.

Don't get me wrong—again. I'm not trying to reconstruct a program that is so dear to my heart. Please God it remains as changeless as its cornerstone, truth. But you want to know something? We old-timers do understand. We do love you. We do know a thing or two. *And we do have problems.*

So won't you try to be patient with us? After all, you, too, will become an old-timer if you live long enough.

And may the road rise with you.

C. J. R., Manhattan, New York

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Co-founder Quotes

Bill W.

During acute depression, avoid trying to set your whole life in order all at once. If you take on assignments so heavy that you are sure to fail in them at the moment, then you are allowing yourself to be tricked by your unconscious. Thus you will continue to make sure of your failure, and when it comes you will have another alibi for still more retreat in depression.

In short, the "all or nothing" attitude is a most destructive one. It is best to begin with whatever the irreducible minimums of activity are. Then work for an enlargement of these—day by day. Don't be discouraged by setbacks—just start over.

*Reprinted from As Bill Sees It, page 308,
with permission AA World Services, Inc.*

Where Did This Insane Bit Come In?

Step Two - We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

“We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” This was an extremely easy Step for me the first time around. I just said, “I believe that God can restore me to sanity.” That was it—no fanfare, no shouting, no horns.

How ignorant of the Second Step I was. I had no inner feeling of acceptance and no real belief of any kind. Who said I was crazy in the first place? All I admitted was that I was powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable, and I wasn’t totally convinced of that. My powerlessness over drink was a statement that I was forced to make, not one that I really believed. On the other hand, a brief review of my life—the loss of my medical license and the loss of my worldly goods, including my home and cars—convinced me that my life was unmanageable. But was that because I was powerless over alcohol? And where did this insane bit come in?

I got my money’s worth out of my sponsor. Sean showed me that there were a few faults in my thinking, like my denying the reality of my situation and my projecting the causes of my problems onto others rather than admitting that I was the source of them. He pointed out that these were mechanisms used by the mentally ill and suggested perhaps that was why I was using them. Sean also said that if it was too hard to admit I was powerless over alcohol, I could assume I was powerless over my emotions and that is why I drank.

Okay, now we were getting somewhere. I could admit that I was powerless over my emotions without having an attack of shame. This allowed me to say that my emotions were the cause of my drinking; therefore, I wasn’t powerless over alcohol or insane. Just a little more self-control over my thoughts was in order.

Son of a gun, it was months later before I saw that when I said I drank because I was powerless over my emotions I was actually saying I was powerless over alcohol. I finally started to believe it.

Sean pointed out that rationalization was a prominent part of my personality as well, and as the Big Book says, “Rationalization is giving socially acceptable reasons for socially unacceptable behavior, and socially unacceptable behavior is a form of insanity.” Sean had me now. I admitted that my life was unmanageable and that I probably was powerless over alcohol. However, it still took many more months for me to truly believe in the latter.

The Second Step I just breezed through. I said it out loud, and that was that. Somehow, I felt that I was getting away with something, though. How could my sponsor put up such a fight about the First Step and just let the Second slip by? Ignorance is bliss, and I sure was in the market for some bliss.

Now I suspect Sean didn’t put up a fuss because he wanted to avoid an argument over God or a Higher Power. The Third Step was going to be tough enough without getting into a free-for-all over Step Two. I had a great deal of difficulty with the acceptance of a Higher Power. In my mind, I confused God and/or a Higher Power with religion. I couldn’t accept that of all the religions in the world, only one was right and the others wrong. I also thought that if I didn’t believe in a God, I couldn’t be a bad person who broke God’s rules. (I didn’t know then that I was not being bad, just sick.)

When I first went to AA, I was in pretty sorry emotional shape. I had used mood-altering chemicals and alcohol to try to survive the awful way my life was going. Now, when I was told that I couldn’t drink or drug anymore, I didn’t think that life was worthwhile. How could I tolerate the agonies I had to endure?

At AA meetings, I did see that sober people seemed to be calm and happy. I didn’t know what they were taking, but obviously it was working. I wanted some of it, and if going to meetings was what it took to feel better, then that is what I would do. My way wasn’t working anymore. I was ready to try their way.

I went to one hundred meetings in ninety days. My life centered on them. I listened, read the Big Book, and talked to my sponsor and many other people about what they thought was helping them. I discovered serenity in those meetings, and I started to feel moments of peace and calm. Something was happening. Some of the Promises seemed to be coming true.

Every day I commuted thirty miles to work. One morning, while mulling over the inequities of life, I finally said to myself, “Okay, I’ll try it. God, you take my worries; I can’t handle them. I am only human, and I am not perfect. You, on the other hand, are not human and you can tolerate this stress. You handle my life. I leave the results and the what-ifs to you.” Immediately, I felt peace and serenity flood

continued →

Humor from the Grapevine

An Al-Anon and an AA member went on a camping trip together. Each had been active members of their programs for twenty-three years and they were enjoying themselves tremendously.

Then night came, and they went to sleep in their tent. About three in the morning, the Al-Anon woke the alcoholic and asked, "What do you see?"

"Why, I see a sky full of brilliant stars and gorgeous moonlight," the alcoholic replied. "How great is our Higher Power for creating such a beautiful night. What do you see?"

The Al-Anon answered, "I see that somebody has stolen our tent."

« « « » » »

A boss asked an employee—who repeatedly swore he had no problem with booze—if he believed in life after death. "Sure," was the hearty reply.

"Good," said the boss, "because thirty minutes after you left work yesterday to go to your grandma's funeral, she stopped by to see you."

« « « » » »

Three or four AA members were often tying up the floor at meetings. One day, we heard a new voice from the back pipe up and say, "Can I have my dollar back if I don't get to share?"

« « « » » »

One veteran AA says the trouble with "Two-Stepping" is that you usually combine the wrong parts of the First and Twelfth Steps, i.e., "My life is unmanageable, and I'd like to share it with you."

« « « » » »

A True Story

My next door neighbor knows that I have had problems with alcohol in the past. She also knows that I am recovering. Recently, I met her in the hall as I was leaving for an AA meeting and she asked me where I was going. I said, "To an AA meeting." To my surprise, she looked at me in a perplexed manner and said, "But...I thought you quit drinking!"

« « « » » »

Insane *continued*

over me. I was overwhelmed and thrilled by the results. I told myself, "How simple taking the Third Step really is. I just tell my Higher Power to take over because I can't do it anymore."

Although I had made it hard, the concept was simple. I had achieved serenity by turning my life and will over to the care of my Higher Power. I had started my path to sobriety, which I defined as the state of not being drunk—in other words, a state of mental and emotional balance.

It took three more years of working my program to realize that my acceptance of a Higher Power has been the single most important thing in restoring my sanity. This was the only thing that has allowed me not to dwell on what might be but to live my life for this minute, not to catastrophize but to enjoy life without fear. Acceptance of a God restored me to sanity.

William S., Carson City, Nevada

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New Additional Contribution

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