

RECOVERY TIMES

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The Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office Monthly Newsletter

A.A.: SPIRITUALITY OR RELIGION?

“God brought me to A.A. and through A.A. I found God”

An A.A. in the program recently texted me a message which expressed his religious belief within the context of recovery. The text was sent to me as part of a group text, which means that he texted it to 15 people at the same time. He did so without asking my permission and without my requesting his input on my program.

While I believe he meant no harm by sending me this religious message, which asked me to accept his God as my savior, it rubbed me the wrong way. For one thing, I have a different belief of God which I don't feel the need to justify or explain to him. Secondly, he was assuming that His view was more right than anyone else's.



In the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, I found the God of my understanding and my life is now centered around my Higher Power. In the Big Book, Chapter 4 is entitled, “We Agnostics.” This chapter addresses why we are a spiritually-based program and how, “We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves.” (Pg. 45, 4th edition). On pg. 46 it continues, “Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, provided we took other simple steps.”

Clearly, this person was an example of the A.A. who, caught up by a religious fervor, thought there was no harm in sharing his own belief system to myself and others. So I asked some A.A. to contribute their thoughts on this, often controversial, issue. Here's what they said:

“In the A.A. prelude it says ‘**A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.**’ It is very clearly stated that A.A. is not taking a stand on any particular religion.” (A.S. 24 Years)

“Personally, I don't like to see religion brought into the program beyond a person's own personal share about their experience. But to make it a part of A.A. -- it doesn't belong there because [we're] not a religious fellowship, we're a spiritual fellowship. And spiritual fellowships encompass everyone's faith.” (B.C. 24 years).

“I think it's very disruptive and really disrespectful of other people and the Traditions to talk about religion. It makes things less inclusive. It's also our singleness of purpose. What are we doing here? We're not here to listen to people's religious theories; we're here to get sober.” (L.S. 16 Years).

“Well spirituality is what we talk about and I think it's good for people to have religious faith but I don't think it's good for the meeting for people to go on and on about their religious beliefs. “It's says in the Big Book about God returning us to sanity. But too much talk about religion in a meeting tends to turn off the newcomer and some of the old-timers. No one came to a meeting to get a sermon; they came here to get sobriety.” (R.P. 11 Years).



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Service Opportunities

The Burbank Group: "65 Years of Love & Service"
Sunday, February 12, from 8AM-10PM. 3217 Winona Ave., Burbank

Imperial Valley Round-up

Feb. 10 – 12, 2012
Brawley, CA

www.area8aa.org

28th Annual Sunshine of the Spirit

High Desert A.A. Convention
March 9 – 11, 2012
Victorville, CA (Ambassador Hotel)
www.highdesertconvention.com

All California Young People in A.A.

March 15 – 18, 2012
Ontario Convention Center
2000 E. Convention Center Way, Ontario, CA
Acypaa2012.org

THINGS WE CANNOT CHANGE:

MILT M. – 44 YEARS

If you are aware of the passing of a member of our Fellowship, please call us at (818) 988-3001 or email an obituary to: sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net



Phone Shifts: Central Office needs telephone volunteers for all shifts (esp. midnight – 9 a.m.). If you have a year or more of continuous sobriety, you can sign up online: www.sfvaa.org 818) 988-3001.

Gen Service, District 11: Mon, March 5, 2012

6 p.m. New GSR orientation/ 6:30 p.m. Bus. Mtg.
315 W. Vine Street, Glendale, CA

Gen Service, District 16: Mon, March 5, 2012

6:15 p.m. meeting, 15950 Chatsworth, Granada Hills

Gen. Service, District 17: Mon, March 5, 2012

6 p.m. New GSRs. /6:30 p.m. Bus. Meeting
5000 Colfax, N. Hollywood

Gen. Service, District 2: Tues, March 6, 2012

6:30 p.m. Business Meeting, 4011 Dunsmore Ave.,

Valley Hospitals and Institutions Committee: Carry the message of A.A. into hospitals, prisons and treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Call Central Office if interested. **Mon, Feb. 20, 2012** 7:00 Orientation, 8 p.m. Business Meeting, 5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

San Fernando Valley Young People in AA:

Committee Meeting is held the 1st Sunday of each month **Sunday, March 4th**, Unit A., 10641 Burbank Blvd, NoHo.

Public Information Committee: Provides info to the general public about what A.A. does. Need volunteers, especially young people and Spanish-speaking AAs, for health fairs & speaking at schools & businesses. Call Central Office for info: 818) 988-3001.

SFV Intergroup: Mon, March 12, 2011

6:30 Orientation, 7 p.m. Business Meeting
St. Innocent Ch., 5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana The SFV Central Office coordinates a monthly meeting for all Intergroup reps on the 2nd Monday of each month. New Intergroup reps should arrive at 6:30 p.m. for orientation.

Gen Service, District 1: Wed., March 7, 2012

6:30 p.m. Business Meeting, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

SFV Central Office Board Mtg.: Wed., March 7, 2012

6:30 p.m., Valley Central Office

Gen. Service District 7: Sat., March 3, 2012

9 a.m. Business Meeting, Agua Dulce Women's Club
33210 Agua Dulce Canyon Road

HAVING A BIRTHDAY? Celebrate it with A.A. by sending a donation to Central Office. We will post your birthday here in the Recovery Times. Please consider making a \$1.00 donation for each year of your sobriety. You'll be helping Central Office reach alcoholics over the phone lines, 24-hours a day/7-days a week. **This month's sober birthday celebrants are:**
David M. – 7 Years, Lisa – 8 Years, Anon. – 13 Years, Roy G. – 19 Years, Tony S. – 28 Years
Learning to Live Men's Stag – 266 Years.

Quotes from our Founders

"When, therefore, we AAs look to the future, we must always ask ourselves if the spirit which now binds us together in our common cause will always be stronger than those personal ambitions and desires which tend to drive us apart. Though the individual AA is under no human coercion, is at almost perfect personal liberty, we have, nevertheless, achieved a wonderful unity on vital essentials." **Bill W. June 1988**

"Tolerance expresses itself in a variety of ways: in kindness and consideration toward the man or woman who is just beginning the march along the spiritual path and in sympathy toward those whose religious ideas may seem to be at great variance with our own." **Dr. Bob, August 1988**

"It is the practice of Steps Four through Twelve that teaches us our understanding of God. This understanding starts with blind faith; through conviction it steadily grows into conscious contact with God – personal contact. Spiritual growth is our goal. We are wise to avoid all concepts of God opposed to that goal." **The Little Red Book, Pg. 39**

CENTRAL OFFICE NEWS:

LIVE 24/7 PHONE SERVICE: Whether you are reaching out for help from another AA member or surfing the Web, you can find the Valley Central Office any hour of the day or night. Visit us at: www.sfvaa.org for meeting info, upcoming events, service meeting info, and links to other cool AA websites or call to speak with a sober AA member: (818) 988-3001.

HAS YOUR MEETING CHANGED? If your meeting info changes (location, time, meeting name or type of meeting), let Central Office know. Please provide meeting updates in writing by mail or delivered in person during office hours.

Central Office: IGR Mtg. Notes of December 11, 2011

- **Chair Cheryl A.** opened the meeting with *The Serenity Prayer*.
- **Recording Secretary Dawn H.** accepted a motion for approval of minutes from December's Intergroup Meeting. The minutes were approved with minor corrections.
- **Treasurer Brian H.** reported that Central Office ended 2011 in the black \$12,629 MTD and in the black \$8,425 YTD. We are ahead of last year's YTD totals by approximately \$3,600 thanks to generous Gratitude Month donations.
- A full Treasurer's Report is available in this month's *Recovery Times*.
- **Executive Secretary Bob F reported** a terrific phone volunteer staff over the holidays thanking all who were of service. The "garage sale" of "slightly damaged books" from the inventory at Central Office will be in February at the next regularly-scheduled Intergroup Meeting. All are welcome to shop.
- **Vice Chair Andre W.** introduced four new IGR reps. IGRs were encouraged to recruit IGRs for some of the 300+ groups in the Valley that are not currently represented.
- **H & I Tom T.** said H & I needs sober alcoholics to take panels into the L.A. County jails. Jail clearance is required and those who are interested were encouraged to attend the upcoming H&I meeting the 3rd Monday of the month at St. Innocent. Orientation: 7PM, meeting: 8PM.

IGR Birthdays:

Tom – 4 years	Carrie – 9 years
Kate – 5 years	Steve – 10 years
Jimmy J. 6 yrs	Don – 22 years

Meeting adjourned with *The Lord's Prayer* at 7:23 p.m.

International A.A. Calendar: Feb. 2012

Spacecoast Roundup – Cocoa Beach, FL
The Philippines Convention – Cebu City, The Philippines
25th Mid Winter Roundup – Fredericton, New Brunswick
Yellow Rose Conference, Trinity, Texas
61st Greeley Stampede – Greeley, Colorado
61st Kentucky State Convention, Louisville, Kentucky
7th International "Near the Waves" Convention – Kerala State, India
Ligonier Midwinter Spiritual Roundup – Ligonier, Pennsylvania
Winter Holiday Convention – North Little Rock, Arkansas
25th Salt City Mid-Winter Roundup – Syracuse, NY
39th East Central Region Conference of Delegates – Miamisburg, OH 15th Dixie Winterfest - St. George, Utah
48th International Women's Conference – Washington, D.C.

A.A.: Religion or Spirituality? (Cont. page 1)

"Religion has no role in A.A. as far as I'm concerned. It has a role in the individual A.A. member's life, but not in A.A. as a whole or in a meeting - for a lot of reasons. That's why 'God' doesn't get a name and there are no locations or references made to the different religions around because we are not a religious program; we are a spiritual program. Those people who want to give religious testimony can do it wherever they want but not in the program of A.A. because it's a severe break in our Traditions." (B.F. 30 Years)

On page 50 of the Big Book, the issue of different belief systems is covered with these words: "In our personal stories you will find a wide variation in the way each teller approaches and conceives of the Power which is greater than himself. Whether we agree with a particular approach or conception seems to make little difference. Experience has taught us that these are matters about which, for our purpose, we need not be worried. They are questions for each individual to settle for himself." (Pg. 50, 4th edition).

"I respect people's religious beliefs but I don't think it's appropriate to talk specifically about religion from the podium. This is a spiritual program, not a religious one. I do think it can scare newcomers away. If I heard people talking about J____ when I first came in, I probably wouldn't have come back. It makes me frigging cringe!" (R.L. 16 Years).

"I agree with the 11th step principle, "Be quick to see where religious people are right." Since my faith is an assimilation of all faiths and philosophies, I am always alert to new concepts that might enhance my spiritual growth. I'm happy the literature of A.A. stays away from endorsing any particular religion, however, since that would turn away most alcoholics from the very start of our recovery, including myself." (S.N. 9 Years).

The bottom line is that we, as A.A. members, must learn to practice love and tolerance of other people's spiritual beliefs. Singleness of purpose requires that we maintain a focus on alcoholism and sobriety, not on outside issues. Overall, we must remember to respect others' beliefs for Love and Tolerance is our Code.

Editor, Pat K.

I Wish You Desperation

One more time in detox! How'd I get here again? I had been in detox so many times that when everyone sat around telling war stories and comparing wristbands to see who had been there the most times, I would get up and walk away. When I was directly asked how many times I had been there, I began replying, "A lot. It was embarrassing being the one with the most trips to detox. It wasn't even cool with alcoholics and addicts anymore. It was just embarrassing, period!"

I wondered if this time would be different or if maybe I would be struck with the miracle that everyone talked about. I needed something! Anything! I prayed to God or whatever was out there, "Please just help me or let me die." I never believed in any sort of God, religion or in praying. But they said it worked, and at this point I didn't really care what I had to do; I was willing to try anything. I was willing to sit down, shut-up and listen; do whatever someone else told me to do and even pray, if that's what it took.

Again it was time for the H & I panel that we all dreaded so much. I was tired of all the corny clichés and I had always hated one in particular. "I wish you desperation." I heard this one over and over and I thought it was the meanest thing anyone could say. Why would someone wish something so awful on me?

A girl on the panel was sharing her story, but I was only catching bits and pieces of it as I crawled out of my skin. Finally she was almost done and I thought to myself "Thank God, it's almost med time." At the very end of her story she finished with "I wish you desperation." There it was again! But this time instead of thinking "Not again!" my first thought was "No shit!" I finally understood it! I had sunk so low, so many times and it had always gotten worse with each relapse. I had lost all of my material possessions; my cars, house, businesses, clothes, family pictures, and basically everything I had ever owned. Not only did I lose material things but I

also lost all of my family and I couldn't even remember what a friend was. But even worse, I had lost any semblance of who I had ever been. I was just angry, bitter, hateful, mean, and depressed.

There was one good thing I had and it was a new thing: I had desperation: Desperation to become willing; to do the opposite of what I wanted to do; to take direction; to do whatever it took and that meant doing all those things I thought were lame, corny, weak and wouldn't work for me.

After 32 years of drinking/using and about 20 years of trying to get sober, for the first time ever, I finally have more than 30 days sober. I now have 9 months! I never believed I could be in the "months" category and soon I will be in the "years" category! I have never been and am still not, a religious person. The words "God" and "Pray" still get to me, but I look at it as sending out positive vibes to the Universe. Whatever it is, it works! The miracle I had been waiting for finally came - and it's thanks to desperation! So, I wish you total and utter desperation! **Denise VZ, Van Nuys**



THE FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM GSO'S "SHARING FROM BEHIND THE WALLS" NEWSLETTER TO INMATES (Reprinted with permission from the A.A. Grapevine, Jan. 2012).

Acceptance: "I'm an inmate currently serving a sentence for a 3rd conviction for driving under the influence. Having spent the last ten years struggling with my alcoholism, both in and out of the rooms of A.A., it's only now that acceptance is coming to light. I need to do the work necessary for recovery, and to regain my life and live a

purposeful existence." **Leonard M.**

Surrender and Win: "I've had problems with drinking since I was 19 years old, and now I am 40 years old. I'm finally ready to stay sober. In the past, I still thought I could drink a little. You know, the things we think we can do as an alcoholic, we can't do. It's our crazy thinking that somehow we can drink - it's total insanity. Today I know I can't drink, not even one sip at any time. I have finally surrendered! As an alcoholic, I know I need to stay focused and never think that I don't need A.A." **Moses H.**

The Big Book: I am 14 years old and am currently in a juvenile correctional facility due to some poor decisions I made. I am writing this letter because I just finished reading the most inspirational book I have ever read in my life. This book, of course, is Alcoholics Anonymous. A couple of weeks ago, one of my peers noticed I was having a rough time. As a result, he told me that he wanted me to read this book because it changed his life and he believed it would change mine. I wasn't even done with the first chapter before it was already catching my attention. I just thought it was so awesome how your words could change thousands of people's lives and change everybody's point of view on alcohol. Not only did it change my point of view on alcohol, but also on drugs. I have been drinking since the age of 11. After your book, it really changed my life. Thank you for that. I hope that you will continue to help more people change their lives just as you did mine. Once again, thank you and God bless you all." **Anonymous.**

"This isn't my first time in jail, but I'm hoping it's my last. I've been through several treatment centers and different programs. I don't have a sponsor but am committed to getting a temporary sponsor when I get released from jail. Since I've been locked up, I've done a lot of studying of A.A.'s Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve. I've been trying to quit drinking for almost two years, off and on. The part about not asking for help and not humbling myself to get rid of my self-pride to better understand God's will for me is at an end." **Kevin R.**

The Steps: "My name is Russ and I am an alcoholic. I am 45 years old and currently residing in a minimum security prison. I was arrested in 2009 for my fifth DUI in less than ten years. I have not had a drink since. By God's will, no one was ever hurt physically through my actions. I had no idea that my sentence would allow me to embark on what I now know to be the most uplifting and rewarding spiritual journey of my life. My incarceration meant that I would lose my business, home, possessions, and standing in my community. In the beginning of 2010, I found myself alone in a cell, completely and utterly bankrupt- mentally, physically and spiritually. It was at this point that I resolved to take my own life. I languished in my woe and self pity for nearly a week. I was quite familiar with A.A., having succeeded several times in abstaining for several years at a time. Despite this, I always found myself lacking something, which led in time to another active bout with alcoholism. In the wee hours of the morning on January 7, 2010, I awoke from a fitful sleep in a strange and surreal moment of clarity. I tumbled from my bunk, hit my knees and took the first three steps. It's now a year and a half later and I have suffered no return to all the encompassing blackness that was my prevailing mental state. In addition, I have but one amend to complete my Eight Step list. There are some 1,250 men incarcerated with me at this facility. Homemade liquor consumption and desperation are the norm. My new life, and more importantly, my past experience has given me a unique ability to try to help others, who like me, consider themselves beyond help." **Russ G.**

The Cost of Drinking & Driving



Pat K.

According to the latest traffic statistics from the National Safety Council (2010 Safety Facts):

- The economic cost of alcohol- related motor vehicle accidents is approximately \$32.6 billion per year.
- During a one-year time period, alcohol was involved in 32% of all traffic-related deaths.
- One alcohol-related death occurs every 45 minutes.
- 32 die every day in the U.S. from an alcohol-impaired driver.
- 3 out of every 10 Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related collision in their lifetimes, whether or not they drink.
- Alcohol is the most commonly-used intoxicating drug.

These are sobering thoughts to all who drive:

Zero Tolerance: As a result, the Government Highway Safety Association's figures show more and more states imposing stricter penalties and fines on alcohol-impaired drivers. In California, this includes a zero tolerance limit for minors meaning that even when there is no accident involved, any amount of alcohol found in the blood of a minor is treated as an offense leading to a suspended driver's license revocation. Zero tolerance laws also apply in many industries where an employee who is required to drive as part of their job is found to have been drinking alcohol.

The Law: For motorists with a blood alcohol level of .08, the result is impoundment and confiscation of the vehicle, revocation of one's license, and the possibility of an alcohol-ignition interlock device (mandatory in L.A. County).

What alcohol does to motorists: Alcohol is primarily a central nervous system depressant impairing brain



functions and decreasing motor responses, responses to stimuli, and one's decision-making ability. Even when someone doesn't 'feel' drunk, their responses are measurably different from those who have not been drinking. Experts say no amount of alcohol is 'safe' when driving. While we can't control how others drive, we can look out for others who may be drinking. If a family member or friend has been drinking, consider taking their keys away and calling them a cab. By reaching out and helping another alcoholic, you may save lives.

The 12 Steps through Word Search. Each month, Recovery Times features the Step of the Month. This month, February, we are featuring Step Two. **Find the words to Step Two below:**

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

T O G E T H E R O R O C
H O W B I N G E U E J A
A M G R E A T E R S O M
T A E X N L F O O T O E
H M R E A R I R A O W E
A P O W E R L E I R C A
N E E D O R R E V E O R
K T N P O G T S E E U R
R O U R S E L V E S L E
W A S A N I T Y O N D X



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