

THE DOCTOR'S OPINION

An explanation of addictive illness found in
the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous

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Herbert Malinoff, MD, FACP, FASAM

Specialist in Chronic Pain and Addictive Illness
Medical Director, Pain Recovery Solutions, PC
Attending Physician, Saint Joseph Mercy Hospital, Ypsilanti, MI
Clinical Faculty, University of Michigan Medical Center, Dept. of
Anesthesiology
Consultant to Michigan Pain Specialists, Ann Arbor, MI
Board Secretary, American Society of Addiction Medicine

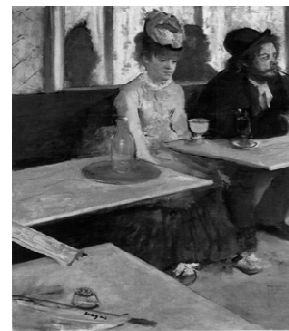
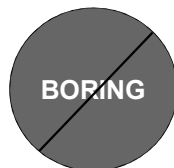
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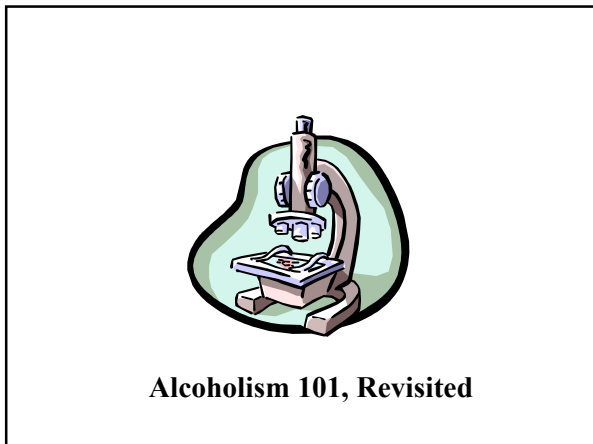
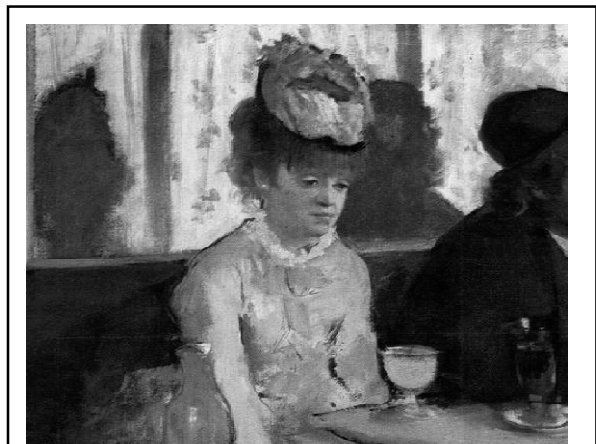
Declarations of Potential Conflicts of Interest

- The content of this presentation is non-commercial and does not represent any conflict of interest

Objectives

- Discuss Dr. Silkworth's explanation of alcoholism as a twofold disease, affecting mind and body
- Relate Silkworth to the modern neurobiology of addictive illness
- Identify therapy for alcoholism as promoted by Alcoholics Anonymous and its relationship to Dr. Silkworth's opinion
- Still have time for questions





Alcoholism 101, Revisited

Alcohol Prevalence

- ☞ 90% Ever drank
- ☞ 60% Current drinkers
- ☞ >40% Temporary problems
- ☞ 10-20% Abuse
- ☞ 3-10% Dependence

JAMA, 2003;290, 1299

**Addiction Poorly Understood by Clinicians
Experts Say Attitude, Lack of Knowledge Hinder Treatment**

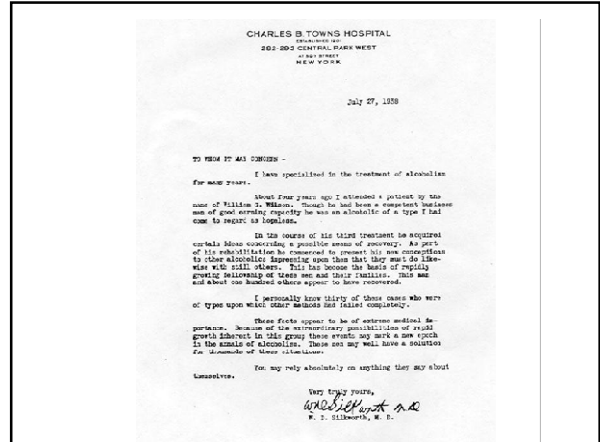
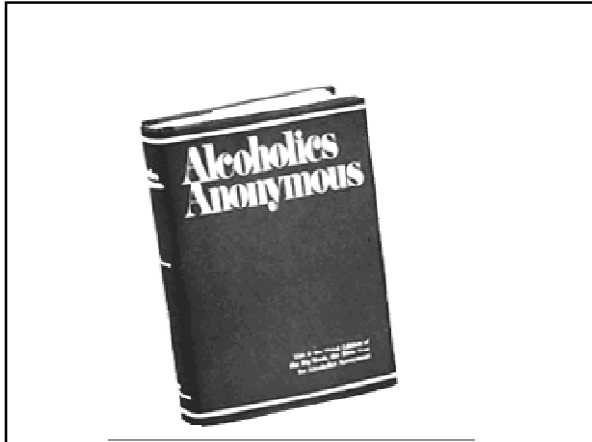
ADDICTION IS COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD AS A MORAL PROBLEM, AND NOT AS A MEDICAL ILLNESS, according to a new study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). The study, which surveyed 1,000 medical students and residents, found that only 1% of respondents considered addiction a medical illness. The study also found that 75% of respondents believed that addiction was a moral problem, and 60% believed that addiction was a chronic disease. The study also found that 75% of respondents believed that addiction was a chronic disease, and 60% believed that addiction was a chronic disease. The study also found that 75% of respondents believed that addiction was a chronic disease, and 60% believed that addiction was a chronic disease.

>Regard Addiction as a moral problem
>1% of medical school curriculum
>Fail to adequately screen
>Believe interventions are ineffective



William Silkworth, M.D.

- Psychiatrist at Towns Hospital 1930's
- Thought alcoholism a twofold illness (mind & body)
- Gave Bill W. Step 1 (the problem)
- Published in *Journal-Lancet*, 1939



Main Points of the “Doctor’s Opinion”

- Dr. Silkworth contends that the discoveries outlined in this book are of extraordinary medical importance and may represent a remedy for alcoholism.
- The medical community has recognized but cannot provide a remedy based on “moral psychology.”
- Alcoholism is a “hopeless” “illness” as there is no effective treatment.

Main Points of the “Doctor’s Opinion” cont’d

- *Alcoholics need some “power” greater than themselves to recover.*
- *Dr. Silkworth describes loss of control and craving as central symptoms of alcoholism.*
- *To produce the essential psychic change needed to cure alcoholism something more than human power is needed.*

The Problem Determines the Solution

The Solution makes no sense without an understanding of the problem

What is the problem.....NOT

- Lack of willpower
- Lack of moral character
- Lack of understanding or education
- Alcohol and/or drugs

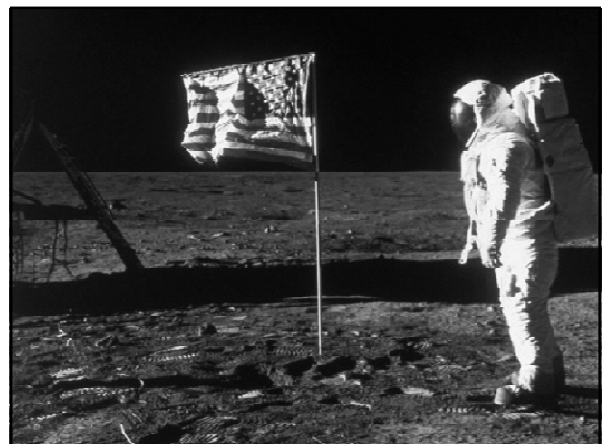
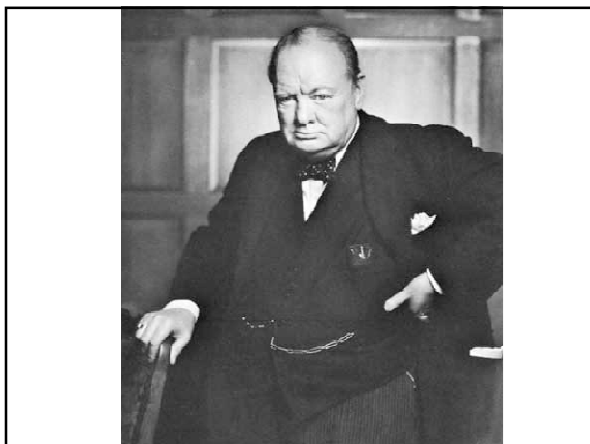
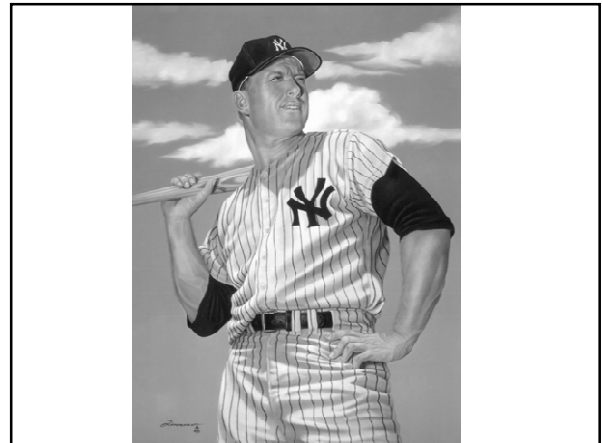
The Problem:

Lack of Willpower

(weak)

The Solution: “Just Do It”

- Avoid bars
 - Avoid drinking buddies
 - Avoid liquor stores
 - Think of baseball



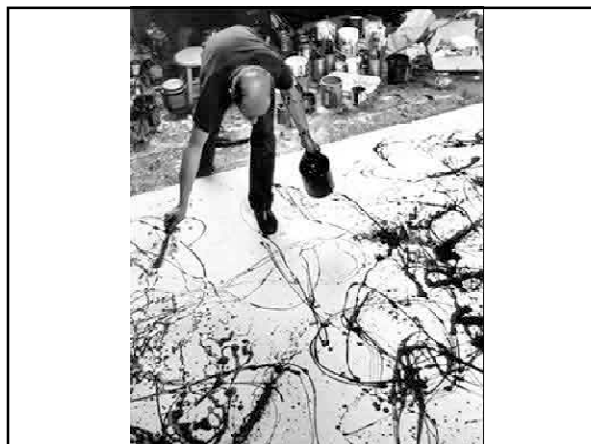
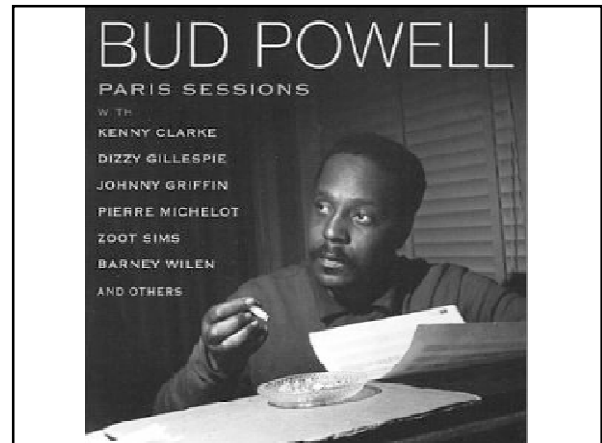
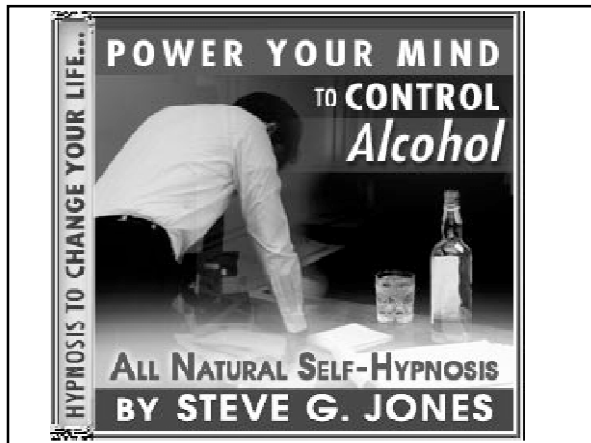
The Problem:

Lack of Knowledge

(dumb)

The Solution:

- Lectures
 - Books
 - Tapes & Videos
 - Self-Knowledge



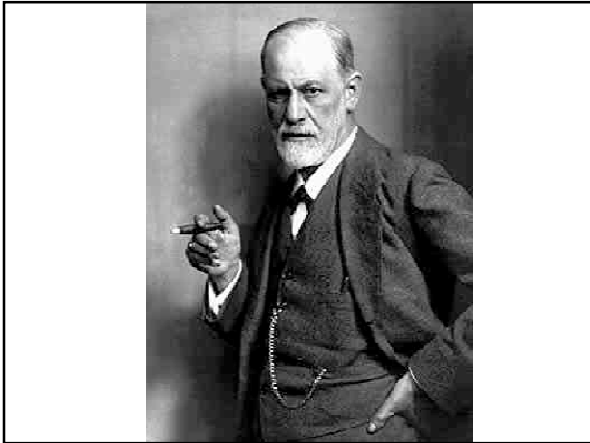
The Problem:

Deep Psychological Problems

(crazy)

The Solution:

- Counseling
 - Psychotherapy
 - Medication (tranquilizers)



**10,000 Pounds of Insight
Isn't Worth 1 Ounce of
Behavior Change**

The Problem:

Lack of Character

(bad)

The Solution:

- A solemn oath
 - A better code of morals
 - A better philosophy of life
 - Organized religion



The Problem:

Alcohol & Drugs

- I have a “drug problem”
- I have a “drinking problem”

The Solution: Abstinence (Dry)

- Restless
- Irritable
- Discontent
- Resentment
- Fear
- Shame & Guilt



Alcohol Problem vs.

Alcoholism

Then What IS the Problem?

An allergy of the body and an
obsession of the mind

Allergy to Alcohol



Definition of Allergy

“An abnormal reaction to any beverage, food, or other substance”

“...the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is the manifestation of an allergy...”

The Doctor's Opinion
Alcoholics Anonymous p. xxviii

What is the “Abnormal Reaction?”

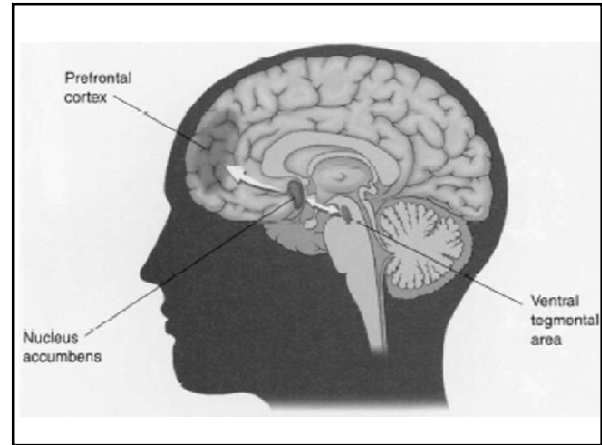
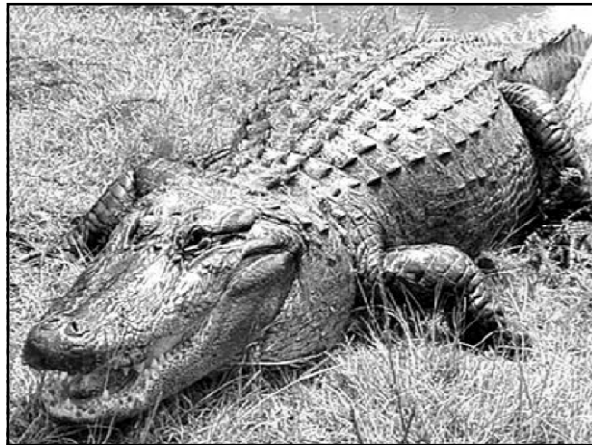
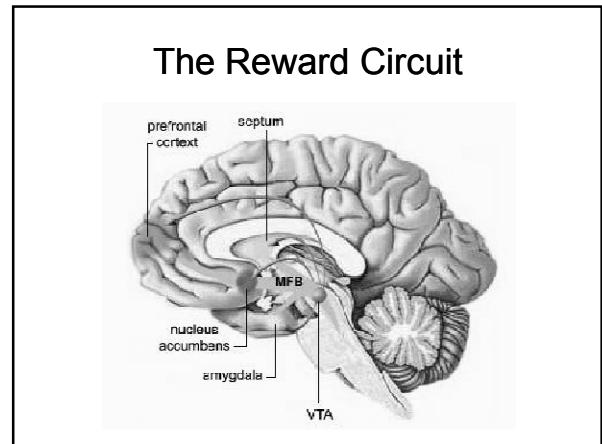
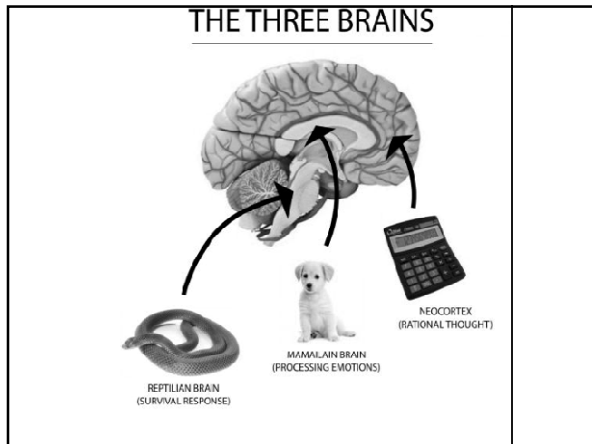
- getting drunk repeatedly
- getting sick repeatedly
 - getting into all kinds of trouble repeatedly

This does not happen to “social drinkers”

The Brain's Design

- Because the brain is so wondrous that most of us assume it has an elegant design.
- In fact, the brain is a kludge (A kludge in the words of Jackson Grandholm is “an ill assorted collection of poorly matched parts, forming a distressing whole”).

From the work of David Linden, Ph.D., described in *The Accidental Mind*



Hedonic Tone

Sense of well being, happiness, pleasure, contentment

"Set" by/in the mesolimbic dopaminergic circuitry (Pleasure/Reward/Survival Center)

Range: Euphoria \leftrightarrow Dysphoria

Altered by Psychoactive Activities

A Delicate Balance

Human Condition

(abnormal tone in the vulnerable to addiction)

53 | ©ASAM 2013

Hedonic Tone Demonstration

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“They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort.....”

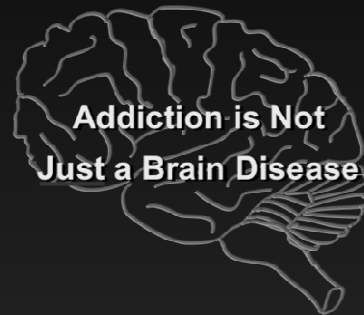
**The Doctor’s Opinion,
Alcoholics Anonymous pp.
xxviii-xxix**

“The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence”

**“The Doctor’s Opinion”,
Alcoholics Anonymous p. xxx**

Can’t start drinking

Rx: “entire abstinence”



Obsession

**“Compulsive preoccupation
with a fixed idea”**



How do we manage primitive drives?

- The primitive parts of our brain control the less primitive (basic drives change our thoughts, we are not rational beings)
- Thus, as long as they are in control our thoughts will not change
 - “Live your way into sober thinking rather than trying to think your way into sober living”

Insanity:

“Being unable to judge or comprehend the consequences of one’s actions.”

- Alcohol vs. a hot stove



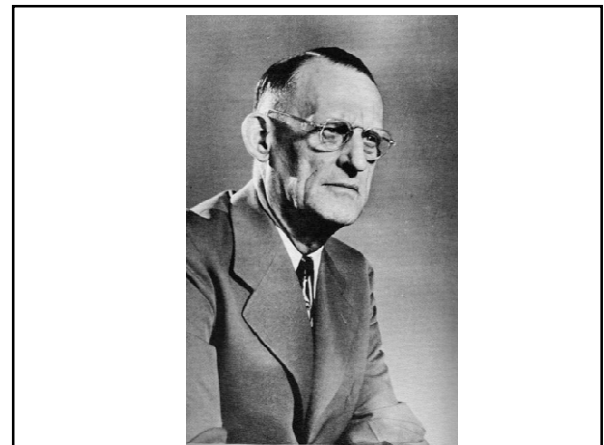
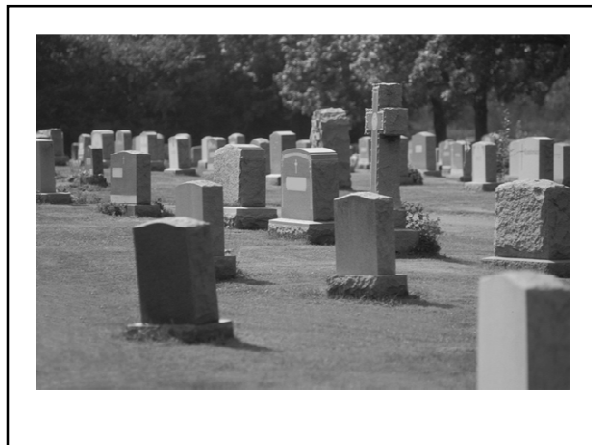
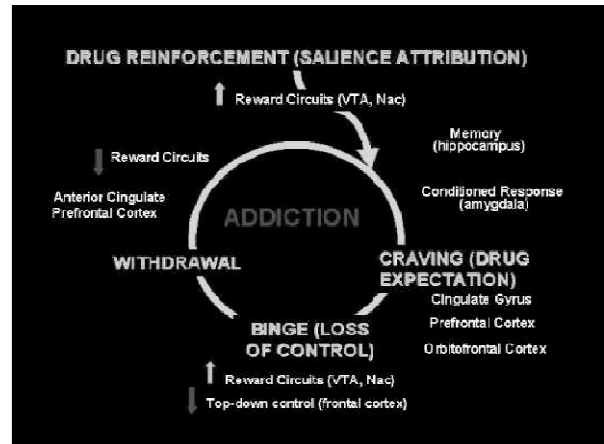
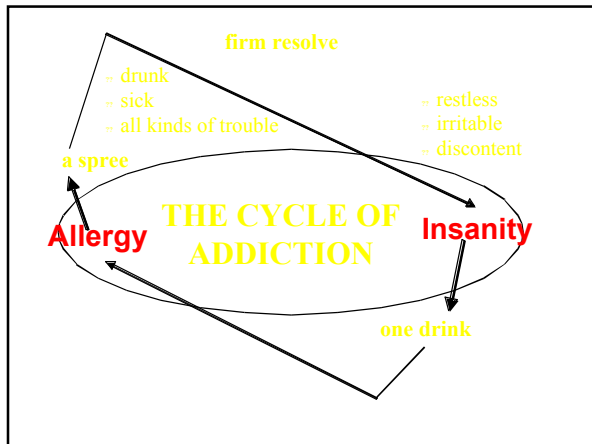
Can’t stop starting

Rx: “Personality change sufficient to recover...”

Allergy + Insanity =

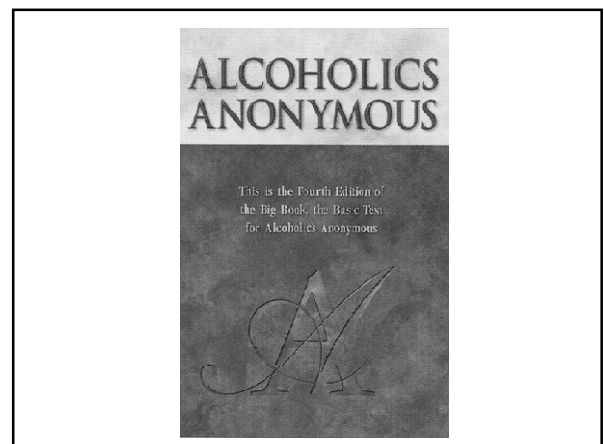
Powerless

- Can’t start drinking (allergy)
- Can’t stop starting (insanity)



Robert Holbrook Smith, MD
“Dr. Bob”
UM Med (1908-10)

- Akron Surgeon
- Co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous
- Treated over 5,000 Alcoholics
- Current AA membership 2.8 million
- 24+ million copies of *Alcoholics Anonymous* sold since 1939



Step 1: THE PROBLEM

“We admitted we were powerless...”

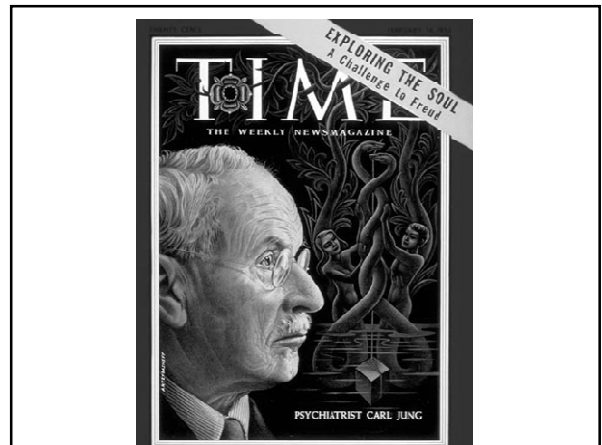
- Hopeless
- Helpless
- Incurable



Step 2: THE SOLUTION

“Came to believe”

- No human power could relieve our alcoholism
- God could and would if he were sought



The Actions Which Bring About the Solution

- Don't Drink
- Go to meetings
- Get a sponsor
- Work steps 4-9
- Prayer
- One day at a time



“From a trembling, despairing nervous wreck, had emerged a man brimming over with self-reliance and contentment”

The Doctor’s Opinion
Alcoholics Anonymous p. xxxi

Main Points of the “Foreward” and the “Doctor’s Opinion”

1. The main point of *Alcoholics Anonymous* is to show precisely how, i.e., what specific actions, we have recovered.
2. Dr. Silkworth contends that the discoveries outlined in this book are of extraordinary medical importance and may represent a remedy for alcoholism.
3. The medical community has recognized but cannot provide a remedy based on “moral psychology.”
4. Alcoholism is a “hopeless” “illness” as there is no effective treatment.
5. Alcoholics need some “power” greater than themselves to recover.
6. Dr. Silkworth describes loss of control and craving as central symptoms of alcoholism.
7. To produce the essential psychic change needed to cure alcoholism something more than human power is needed.

Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past.



Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you - until then.

Big Book, 4th edition, p. 164

