

Spirituality in Recovery: The Many Paths to Spiritual Fitness

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Objectives:

1. Provide some historical framework for the diverse development of spirituality within the recovering community.
2. Explore a variety of ways people in recovery come to understand a Higher Power.
3. Examine the concepts of Spiritual Experience, Spiritual Awakening, and Spiritual Fitness as discussed in recovery literature.

4. Consider the relationship between religion and spirituality and how these concepts are distinguished from each other.
5. Describe some options for developing "Spiritual Fitness."
6. Explore some applications of the 11th Step that says, "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understand Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

'Christianizers' ". . . harbor no room for disagreement about a very explicit Christian content. . . (that includes) efforts to Christianize early AA history, elevate Christian literature on a par with AA's own literature, and assert Christian conversion as a central mechanism of AA's effectiveness."

'Secularizers' "The members of atheist/agnostic AA groups generally direct their 12th Step efforts at this population, (those having no religion) seeking to 'make AA safe for atheists.'" Kurtz & White p. 63

"In our view, the two opposite responses noted earlier within AA will probably continue to be operative into the foreseeable future. Remember, however, that these are 'opposites' and so deal with extremes. The great majority of AA members will more than likely continue to settle somewhere comfortably in-between, generally tolerating the extremes but probably more often than not seeking out groups that better fit their middling inclinations."

Kurtz & White p. 70

"A.A. is so decentralized that there really is no such single entity as 'Alcoholics Anonymous' - only A.A. members and A.A. groups that reflect a broad and ever increasing variety of A.A. experience."

Kurtz & White p. 60

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“If we’re going to be in a program of recovery, we don’t have to find God,

But we do have to look.”

Kevin McCauley

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Distinguishing Religion From Spirituality

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“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 . . . To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all-inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men (and women).”

BB p. 46

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Spiritual and Not Religious Spiritual and Religious Religious and Not Spiritual

11

Finding a Higher Power or God as you understand Him (or her or it)

12

“ - the fundamental and first message of Alcoholics Anonymous to its members is that they are not infinite, not absolute, *not God*. Every alcoholic’s problem had *first* been, according to this insight, claiming God-like powers, especially that of *control*. But the alcoholic at least, the message insists, is *not* in control, even of himself; and the first step towards recovery from alcoholism must be the admission and acceptance of this fact that is so blatantly obvious to others but so tenaciously denied by the obsessive-compulsive drinker.”

P. 3 Not-God

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. . . And he goes on, "Because the alcoholic is not God, not absolute, not infinite, he or she is essentially limited. Yet from this very limitation - from the alcoholic's *acceptance* of personal limitation - arises the beginning of healing and wholeness. It is this facet of the message of "not-God" that Alcoholics Anonymous as fellowship lives out. To be an alcoholic within Alcoholics Anonymous is not only to accept oneself as not God; it implies also affirmation of one's connectedness with other alcoholics."

P. 3-4 Not-God

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"To others, the word 'God' brought up a particular idea of Him with which someone had tried to impress them during childhood. Perhaps we rejected this particular conception because it seemed inadequate. With that rejection we imagined we had abandoned the God idea entirely." BB p. 45

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So, How do we find a Higher Power?

"Well, that's exactly what this book is about."

"Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem."

BB p. 45

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Bill notes,

"You can, if you wish, make A.A. itself your 'higher power.' Here's a very large group of people who have solved their alcohol problem. In this respect they are certainly a power greater than you, who have not even come close to a solution. Surely you can have faith in them."

12 & 12 p. 27

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"There were agnostics in the Tuesday night group, and several hardcore atheists who objected to any mention of God. On many evenings Bill had to remember his first meeting with Ebby. He'd been told to ask for help from anything he believed in. (The idea of "choosing your own conception of God" was first used here.) These men, he could see, believed in each other and in the strength of the group. At some time each of them had been totally unable to stop drinking on his own, yet when two of them had worked at it together, somehow they had *become more powerful* and they had finally been able to stop. This, then-whatever it was that occurred between them-was what they could accept as a power greater than themselves."

Bill W. p. 230

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Big Book Names for God

- God as we understand Him
- The One
- Power
- Higher Power
- Power greater than themselves
- God
- Him, He, His . . .
- Father of Light
- Czar of the Heavens
- Supreme Being
- Spirit
- Realm of Spirit
- Spirit of the Universe
- Spirit of Nature
- Creation
- Creator
- Creative Intelligence

- Universal Mind
- God-Consciousness within
- Great Reality
- Presence of God
- Brotherhood of Man
- Newfound Friend
- Director
- Principal
- Employer
- Broad Highway
- New Land
- Reason
- Bridge of Reason
- God of Reason
- Presence of Infinite Power and Love
- All Powerful, Guiding, Creative Intelligence

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How do we Conceptualize a Higher Power?

20

- Traditional Religious Images
- Anthropomorphic Images
- Gender? Race? Age?
- Spirit? Power? Energy? Force? Color?
- Defined by the needs we bring to the relationship?
- Lessons from Jodi Foster . . .
- Incomplete Understanding?

How do you Identify your Higher Power ?

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Spiritual Experience or Spiritual Awakening

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“The terms “spiritual experience” and “spiritual awakening” are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms.”

“Sudden and spectacular upheavals”

vs

“educational variety”
that develop slowly over a period of time.

BB p. 567

Why be Spiritually Fit?

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“The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink (or drug). Except in a few rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a Higher Power.”

BB p. 43

Spiritual Fitness

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“First we will wish to be reasonably certain that we are on the A.A. beam.” 12 & 12 p. 84

“Without necessarily taking that first drink, we often get quite far off the beam.” 12 & 12 p. 112

“We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation. We feel as though we had been placed in a position of neutrality-safe and protected. We have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for us. We are neither cocky nor are we afraid.”

BB p. 85

Spiritual Acts Promoting Spiritual Fitness

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Spiritual Acts include:

- working the Steps,
- attending meetings,
- service to others,
- prayer & meditation,
- working with our sponsors, and
- supporting the newcomer.

“The great fact is just this and nothing less: That we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, towards our fellows and towards God’s universe. 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.”

BB p. 25

“We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. ‘Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?’ As soon as a man (or woman) can say that he does believe, or is willing to believe, we emphatically assure him that he is on his way.”

BB p. 47

Avoiding Spiritual Arrogance

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“Here’s a recent example of the high cost of spiritual pride. A very tough minded prospect was taken to his first AA meeting. The first speaker majored on his own drinking pattern. The prospect seemed impressed. The next two speakers each themed their talks on “God as I understand him.” This could have been good, too, but it certainly wasn’t. The trouble was their attitude, the way they presented their experience. They did ooze arrogance. In fact, the final speaker got far overboard on some of his personal theological convictions . . . Quite unspoken, yet implicit in everything they said, was the same idea - “Folks, *listen to us*. We have the only true brand of AA - and you’d better get it! The new prospect said he’d had it - and he had. His sponsor protested that this wasn’t real AA. But it was too late; nobody could touch him after that. He also had a first class alibi for yet another bender. When last heard from, an early appointment with the undertaker seemed probable.”

Language of the Heart p. 252-253.

Avoiding Spiritual Arrogance

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“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 . . . These are questions for each individual to settle for himself.”

“On one proposition, however, these men and women are strikingly agreed. Every one of them has gained access to, and believes in, a Power greater than himself. This Power has in each case accomplished the miraculous, the humanly impossible.”

BB p. 50

The Skeptical Religious Ones

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“Now let’s take the guy full of faith, but still reeking of alcohol. He believes he is devout. His religious observance is scrupulous . . . To clergymen, doctors, friends, and families, the alcoholic who means well and tries hard is a heartbreaking riddle . . . This answer has to do with the quality of faith rather than its quantity . . . We supposed we had humility when we really hadn’t. We supposed we had been serious about religious practices when we found we had only been superficial. Or going to the other extreme, we wallowed in emotionalism . . . The fact was we really hadn’t cleaned house so that the grace of God could enter us and expel the obsession. In no deep or meaningful sense had we taken stock of ourselves, made amends to those we had harmed, or freely given to any other human being without demand for reward. . . The love of God and man we understood not at all. Therefore we remained self-deceived, and so incapable of receiving enough grace to restore us to sanity.”

12 & 12 p. 31-32

Spirituality in Two Words . . . ³¹

“ . . . the spirituality that we witnessed (in A.A.) can be summed up in two words - the prepositions *beyond* and *between* . . . ”

“*Beyond*, then suggests a dual transcendence: *out* from the narrow confines of the self-centered self; and *up* toward some reality greater than, larger than, the self-involved self. ‘Selfishness-self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles’, A.A.’s basic text suggests, capturing a truism that applies not only to alcoholics.” Kurtz & White p. 65

“Spirituality’s second preposition, *between*, offers a specification of ‘*beyond*’s’ horizontal transcendence: it *connects* with others. ‘*Between*’ is more apt than ‘beside’ because it connotes actual connection rather than mere next-ness: there is ‘something’ *between*, something linking, . . . *uniting* two parties, and holding them in a certain connection.’ Spirituality, then, in ‘pulling beyond’ also *pulls to, connects*.” Kurtz & White p. 66

. . . at its most basic level, spirituality in recovery is about adopting behaviors and attitudes that lift us up and *beyond* ourselves towards a Higher Power as we understand it,

AND

. . . challenge us to develop transparency and significant connections *between* ourselves and others who are traveling this path.

“You see, our talk was a completely *mutual* thing. I knew that I needed this alcoholic as much as he needed me. *This was it*. And this mutual give-and-take is at the very heart of all of A.A.’s Twelfth Step work today.”

Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age p. 70

Practicing the 11th Step ³⁴

“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understand Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

“Those of us who have come to make regular use of prayer would no more do without it than we would refuse air, food, or sunshine. And for the same reason. When we refuse air, light, or food the body suffers. And when we turn away from meditation and prayer, we likewise deprive our minds, our emotions, and our intuitions of vitally needed support. As the body can fail its purpose for lack of nourishment, so can the soul.” 12 & 12 p. 97

“Prayer is communicating our concerns to a Power greater than ourselves. Sometimes when we pray, a remarkable thing happens; we find the means, ways and energies to perform tasks far beyond our capacities. We grasp the limitless strength provided for us through our daily prayer and surrender, as long as we keep faith and renew it.” NA p. 47

“In quiet moments of meditation, God’s will can become evident to us. Quietening the mind through meditation brings an inner peace and brings us into contact with the God within us. A basic premise of meditation is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain conscious contact unless our mind is still. The usual, never-ending succession of thoughts has to cease for progress to be made.”

NA p. 46-47



Meditation Mechanics

- Environment
- Physical Position
- Breath
- Sustained Focus
- Giraffes not Elephants
- Safe and Quiet Place
- Repetitive Motions/Sounds/Words

“Finding our own way is another matter. We may have a basic understanding of what prayer and meditation are, prayer being the times we talk to a Higher Power and meditation the times we listen for a Higher Power’s answers. We may not be aware of the many options that are open to us. Searching those options out and exploring their usefulness to us can be uncomfortable and time-consuming. It is only by being open-minded and by taking action that we are likely to find what is right for us as individuals. We may experiment with a whole assortment of practices until we find something that doesn’t feel foreign or contrived. If we have found that *everything* feels strange, then we practice a form of prayer and meditation until it no longer seems unnatural. Many of us have adopted an eclectic approach, borrowing our practices from a variety of sources and combining those which provide us the greatest comfort and enlightenment.” *It Works How & Why* p. 109

Not a theory, we have to live it . . .

“It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on our laurels. We are headed for trouble if we do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God’s will into all of our activities.” BB p. 85

“We can only clear the ground a bit. If our testimony helps sweep away prejudice, enables you to think honestly, encourages you to search diligently within yourself, then, if you wish, you can join us on the Broad Highway. With this attitude you cannot fail. The consciousness of your belief is sure to come to you.”

BB p. 55

1. *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. New York, New York, 4th Edition, 2001.
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4. *The Language of The Heart*, “*God as We Understand Him: The Dilemma of No Faith*,” The A.A. Grapevine, New York, New York, 1988.
5. *Narcotics Anonymous*, Narcotics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Chatsworth, California, 6th Edition, 2008.
6. *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Ernest Kurtz, Hazelden, Center City, Minnesota, 1979.
7. *Recovery Spirituality*, Ernest Kurtz and William White, Religions, www.mdpi.com/journal/religions, 27 January 2015.
8. *Spirituality 101: What is 12-Step Spirituality?*, Mary Ellen O’Brien, *Religion & Spirituality*, August 9, 2009.
9. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. New York, New York, 1953.