

A Study of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous

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If you would like to follow along...

- *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*; Fourth Edition; Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., New York, NY; 2001.
- https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/read-the-big-book-and-twelve-steps-and-twelve-traditions

“As Todd Sees It...”

- The information presented in this lecture is being shared from my own personal experience, strength, and hope concerning the AA Big Book and gleaned from many sources; members of Alcoholics Anonymous from across the United States, “Joe and Charlie,” www.aa.org, www.silkworth.net, www.wikipedia.com, other AA conference approved literature, and of course the AA Big Book itself. Most of all however from my sponsor K.C. J., who took the time to read the Big Book with me and guide me through the 12 steps to my own spiritual awakening for which I will be eternally grateful.

What is the “Big Book” and where did it come from?

“Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism (generally known as The Big Book because of the thickness of the paper used in the first edition) is a 1939 basic text, describing how to recover from alcoholism, primarily written by William G. "Bill W." Wilson, one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). It is the originator of the seminal "twelve-step method" widely used to treat many addictions...with a strong spiritual and social emphasis.”

“It is one of the best-selling books of all time, having sold 30 million copies. In 2011, Time magazine placed the book on its list of the 100 best and most influential books written in English since 1923, the year in which the magazine was first published. In 2012, the Library of Congress designated it as one of 88 ‘Books that Shaped America.’“

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Book_\(Alcoholics_Anonymous\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Book_(Alcoholics_Anonymous))

What is the “Big Book” and where did it come from?

- “In May 1938, when Bill W. began work on the first draft of what is now the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, in New York City and Newark, New Jersey, he had been sober about three and a half years. Dr. Bob was sober a few months less than three years, and the other 100 early members who contributed in one way or another to the writing of the book had been sober for periods ranging from a couple of years to a couple of months.”

What is the “Big Book” and where did it come from?

“So, this somewhat shaky, often fearful group of men and women somehow brought to publication, on April 10, 1939, the book Alcoholics Anonymous.

This book became a blueprint for recovery from alcoholism that has been followed successfully for nearly 80 years — and something of a publishing phenomenon. The Big Book has been translated into 69 languages and is read by millions of people in approximately 180 countries around the world. Approximately 35 million copies of the first four editions of the Big Book (in English) have been distributed. It sells about one million copies per year, worldwide.”

https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/f-166_BigBook_BriefHistory.pdf

What is the “Big Book” and where did it come from?

- In short, the Big Book was written by early members of Alcoholics Anonymous with Bill Wilson considered to be the leading contributor. The Big Book outlines the AA program of recovery. Bill Wilson’s influence can be seen in many ways in the book, including the words and language used and also in the style that it was written. A common theme throughout the book, especially in the first 164 pages, is the identification of a problem, the identification of a solution, and a practical program of action to reach that solution.
- **It also includes personal stories or “testimonials” which the authors felt were vitally important to include. (*It is important to study the WHOLE book.*)**

Why do we need to study the Big Book?

“To show other alcoholics *precisely how we have recovered* is the main purpose of this book.” (pg. xiii)

“We hope this volume will inform and comfort those who are or who may be affected. There are many.” (pg. 18)

“..If you are an alcoholic who wants to get it over it, you may already be asking—‘What do I have to do?’

It is the purpose of this book to answer such questions specifically.” (pg. 20)

“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.” (pg. 45)

If it isn’t broke don’t fix it! (Preface, pg. xi)

Why do we need to study the Big Book?

- It is an outline for recovery that provides an understanding of what the problem is (we are powerless—The Doctor’s Opinion and Chapter 1 Bill’s Story), what the solution is (we need to find Power—Chapters 2, 3, and 4), and a planned program of action to reach that solution (how to find that power--Chapters 5, 6, and 7).
 1. Hit bottom (step 1)
 2. Surrender (steps 2, 3)
 3. Deflation of ego in depth (steps 4-9)
 4. Maintain humility (steps 10, 11, and 12)

Bill Wilson

- Ebby Thatcher shared the spiritual solution (something greater than human power AND a practical program of action) that he found in the Oxford Groups with Bill. (pg. 8-15)
 1. The 6 tenets of the Oxford Groups (pg. 263)
- Dr. Silkworth shared the disease concept of addiction (the physical allergy and the mental obsession) with Bill. (pg. xxviii-xxx in the Doctor's Opinion and pg. 7 Bill's Story)
- Bill took action on the practical program (6 tenets) and started trying to “carry the message” but was not finding success, his wife Lois helped him to recognize that **he** was staying sober by carrying the message! (pg.14-15)

Dr. Bob

- Bill Wilson goes to Akron, OH on business, has a HUGE urge to drink...makes some calls and is introduced to Dr. Bob. (pg. 154-156 A Vision For You and pg. 179-180 Dr. Bob's Nightmare)
- Dr. Bob was knowledgeable about the subject of alcoholism and was also very familiar with the tenets of the Oxford Groups. What Bill Wilson shared with Dr. Bob was Bill's own personal experience with alcohol and inability to abstain. According to Dr. Bob, "*In other words, he talked my language.*" (pg. 180)
- Bill Wilson helped Dr. Bob to identify that self-knowledge was not answer, that the disease of alcoholism was two-fold (mental obsession and a physical craving), and how to apply the planned program of action to achieve sobriety.
- Alcoholics Anonymous is born! (June 10, 1935)

Now that we have that out of the way...

- Let's focus our time on the first 3 steps and related readings from the Big Book.
- Step 1---the problem
- Step 2—the solution
- Step 3—the decision to engage in the solution (practical program of action).

Step 1: The Problem (powerlessness and unmanageability)

- The Doctor's Opinion (pg. xxv-xxxii)
 - Medical Director at Towns Hospital in New York for the treatment of alcohol and drug addiction. (pg. xxv)
 - Treated Bill W. on 3 different occasions. (pg. xxv)
 - “These allergic types can *never* **safely** use **alcohol** in any form at all...” (emphasis added)(pg. xxviii)
 - “Men and women drink essentially because they like the **effect** produced by alcohol....” (emphasis added)(pg. xxviii)
 - Psychic change=personality change=spiritual awakening
 - Mental obsession AND a physical allergy. (pg. xxx) “The only relief we have to suggest is entire abstinence.” (***Don't take the first drink!***)

Step 1: The Problem (powerlessness and unmanageability)

- Chapter 1 Bill's Story
 - A “real” alcoholic
 - Bitter morass of self-pity, hopeless. (pg. 8)
 - Ebby shows up and gives Bill hope. (pg. 9-12)
 - “*Why don't you choose your own conception of God?*” (pg. 12) (Why is it important to pay attention to italics?)
 - Bill works the 6 tenets of the Oxford Groups with Ebby. (pg. 13)
 - Bill identifies the necessity of working with other alcoholics (carrying the message); faith without works is dead. (pg. 14, 15)

Step 2: The Solution (We need to find power)

- Chapter 2 There is a Solution (pg.17-29)
 - “The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution...” (pg. 17)
 - “An illness of this sort...” (pg. 18)
 - The importance of one alcoholic/addict sharing with another. (pg. 18) Ebby to Bill, Bill to Dr. Bob, and so on....
 - What the book is about. (pg. 19)
 - Moderate drinkers, hard drinkers, and the real alcoholic. (pg. 20, 21)
 - Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. (pg. 21, 22)
 - The first drink sets the terrible cycle in motion. (pg. 23)
 - Non-existent will power. (pg. 24)
 - *There is a solution.* (pg. 25)
 - Spiritual Experience (Appendix II, pg. 567-568) W.H.O.

Step 2: The need for a solution (Why we need to find power)

- Chapter 3 More About Alcoholism (pg. 30-43)
 - The first step in recovery, a progressive illness. (pg.30)
 - “Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic.” (pg. 33)
 - “To be gravely affected...” (young people, women)(pg.33)
 - The baffling feature of alcoholism. (pg.34)
 - The crux of the problem and our friend Jim. (pg. 35-37)
 - Plain insanity, our sound reasoning, justification (pg. 37)
 - The jay-walker (pg. 37, 38) Simple!
 - Self-knowledge and Fred. (pg. 39-43)
 - No effective mental defense against the first drink. (pg. 43)

Step 2: The Solution—finding the Power we need

- Chapter 4 *We Agnostics* (pg. 44-57)
 - ...you are probably an alcoholic.” (pg.44)
 - A mere code of morals or better philosophy. (pg. 44, 45)
 - The main object of this book-our diemna. (pg. 45)
 - Our own conception of God. (pg. 46, 47)
 - One short question. (pg. 47)
 - “We...beg you to lay aside prejudice...” (pg. 49)
 - Personal stories. (pg. 50)
 - Simple requirements; material progress. (pg. 51)
 - Change our point of view; childish faith. (pg. 52-53)

Step 2: The Solution—finding the Power we need

- Chapter 4 *We Agnostics* (pg. 44-57)
 - Confronted with the question of faith. (pg. 53)
 - Feelings and reason. (pg. 54-55)
 - “With this attitude you cannot fail.” (pg. 55)
 - “Our Southern Friend” (Fritz Mayo) (pg. 56, 57)

Step 3: Making a decision to find Power--Deciding to embark on the practical program of action.

- Chapter 5 How it Works (pg. 58-71)—we will focus on pg.58-64
 - Grasping and developing. (pg. 58)
 - “Rarely have we seen a person fail...” (pg. 58)
 - Willing to go to any length. (pg. 58)
 - “...we beg of you...” (pg. 58)
 - Remember (pg.58, 59)
 - “Here are the steps we took...” (pg. 59, 60)
 - Three pertinent ideas. (pg. 60)

Step 3: Making a decision to find Power--Deciding to embark on the practical program of action.

- Chapter 5 How it Works (pg. 58-71)—we will focus on pg.58-64
 - Being convinced (the actor trying to play the director)(pg. 60-62)
 - Selfishness! Self-centeredness! (pg. 62)
 - Third step promises, third step prayer. (pg. 63)

Time to get busy!

- “Next we launched on a course of vigorous action....” (Step 4)(pg. 63)
- “Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us. Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.” (pg. 64)
- Step 4 (pg. 64-71)
- Steps 5-11 (Into Action pg. 72-88) “It works, it really does.”
- Step 12 (Working with Others pg. 89-103)

The good news is....

- Working the Twelve Steps will not only keep me sober and remove the obsession to drink/use, but it will produce the fruits of:

**PEACE and SERENITY and
enable me to become HAPPY,
JOYOUS and FREE!!!!**

Where do I go from here?

- Questions?
- Comments?
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