

STEP THREE

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

From Belief to Experience to Faith

You may have heard it said that belief is an idea you have about the world and faith is your confidence in your belief born out of experience. Throughout my life, I've held a lot of beliefs, but I haven't had much in the way of faith. One thing I did have faith in was alcohol. Through years and years of experience, using it to treat that restlessness, irritability, and discontent I felt so often, I developed faith that alcohol would always work. For me, it took years to develop that faith, years of intermittently turning to alcohol for relief from a spiritual malady I couldn't name or understand.

So when it stopped working, when the consequences vastly outweighed the benefits, so strong was my faith in alcohol, now bolstered by a physical craving and a mental obsession, that separating me from alcohol was an ugly and prolonged affair.

All of this is instructive when I think about our 3rd Step experience. When the 3rd Step asks me to be "willing to believe" it is not asking for faith. How could it? Like many of us, I came to Step 3 with little to no experience of relying upon a Higher Power, and experience is the soil from which faith grows. Instead, the Step asks me to "believe", or, if I can't quite muster belief, that I be "willing to believe" that a Higher Power can relieve me of my alcoholism.

And what will belief get me? Well, if I believe a Higher Power will relieve my alcoholism if I seek it, then I should take actions in accordance with that belief. Our program will tell me I can seek my Higher Power by cleaning house and helping others. And, as it happens, taking these actions in accordance with my new belief tends to give me spiritual experiences. And these spiritual experiences are where faith in a Higher Power, that long-sought goal that seemed beyond my reach, comes from for me.

So today I am grateful that Step 3 "only" asked me to be willing to believe, because that was all I could offer at the time. And I'm grateful that the AAs who carry the message of Step 3 have faith that willingness to believe is the prerequisite for actions that will bring me into closer contact with my Higher Power. And the more contact with my Higher Power, the greater my faith that, one day at a time, I can connect with my Higher Power and be relieved of my alcoholism for the rest of my life.

Andy P., Collingswood Monday Night

TRADITION THREE

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

This isn't my first rodeo. I've been here three times before. In and out of the rooms like a revolving door. *Disclaimer:* to my readers; it doesn't have to be like that. Frankly, I don't recommend it.

Nevertheless, that is where my journey began. Only difference is, this time I decided to get serious about my recovery and try to understand this whole "AA Thing". As mentioned, I had come into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous before, so I knew a wee bit about how it all worked, although not entirely. I knew that I needed to try to find a homegroup, sponsor, and grab a commitment of some sort to help me stay sober. "Okay, I can do that, I think." Then something happened that I didn't quite comprehend. A friendly, older gent walked up to me one day and asked me if I was a new member of Alcoholics Anonymous. "A member? Did he just say a member? Wait a second. I didn't know I had to be a member to come here! Shit, man." *Cue Anxiety Sweats.*

I gave the man a timid "uhhh, uh-huh." as I quickly slipped away deeper into the pack of cigarette suckers to escape my impending doom. I had no idea what kind of shenanigans or hoops I would now have to jump through to become a member. I am familiar with how memberships work. I have cancelled plenty in my drunken days. I was a member of the Moose Lodge once before. Yeah, that is a story for another time and place. I was even a member of a bowling league way back when. Again, not a story I want to burden you with. A member of Alcoholics Anonymous, though? What have I gotten myself into? What will I have to do to become a member? I want to belong here. Shit, I know I belong here. There's no way to deny the depths of my alcoholism. God, what will they have me do if I let them know how badly I want to become a member? Will I have to start going to some sort of church? Will I have to give them a certain percentage of my paycheck each pay period? Will I have to wear pink on Wednesdays, or give up my first born? (Wait, I don't have kids...Phew! Dodged that one!) I decided to gather my courage and ask a fellow female what this whole "Membership" entailed before I started losing my hair, or sweat completely through my t-shirt due to overthinking.

Let me just say "98% of the things we worry or stress over, never end up happening". This fact was ever so true after speaking to this woman in AA. I hesitantly began telling this poor woman all of my fears as to what sort of debauchery I would have to ensue to become a member of such an incredible group of people. I was mentally freaking out and needed answers like yesterday. The kind woman chuckled and shook her head at my twisted way of thinking and said "Jillian. Take a breath. It's simple. You're a member when you say you are". My brain begins to

melt. Is she saying that all I have to do to become a member of AA is to say so? I look at her with my head cocked to one side like a confused shih tzu puppy. “So you’re telling me that I can walk into any AA meeting place and say ‘Hey ya’ll, I’m Jillian and I’m a member of alcoholics anonymous?’”. She smiled and nodded her head as to say “yes, Jillian”.

Once the woman realized I was finished making a mountain out of a mole hill she went on to explain that “The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking”. I didn’t have to pay an entrance fee, or perform some beginners ritualistic interpretative dance routine, or cut off and donate my favorite finger to science. (Yes, ya’ll know which finger is my favorite. Isn’t it your favorite as well?). All I had to do was have a desire to not drink anymore. It didn’t say “The only requirement for membership is to never, ever drink ever again”. (I do, however, suggest you don’t). It said “a desire”. All I had to do was to want to not drink anymore. All they asked of me is to give it a jolly-good try. I knew I didn’t want to drink any longer. The wreckage left behind due to my drinking looked like a scene out of a BBC Natural Disasters Documentary. I no longer wanted or desired to create that sort of havoc in my life. All I have to do is grasp tightly to this desire not to drink, and I can be a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Since declaring myself a member of AA, getting a sponsor, working the steps, and chairing a few meetings, a lot of wonderful things have happened in my life. I am present in every aspect of my niece’s and nephew’s lives. I have a wonderful relationship with my parents and friends. I am an attentive, hardworking teacher who can be 100% available to my students’ every needs. I now live in a home where sobriety is the number one priority, and I am happily engaged to the coolest kat I know! Living a sober life is one of the best things I have ever done for myself. I wouldn’t trade it for the world. And to think...all I had to have was a desire to stop drinking.

~Jillian M.

PRACTICING THE PRINCIPLES OF THE PROGRAM

There is a scene in *Return of the Jedi* where Darth Vader does an impromptu “performance evaluation” on the Death Star construction manager. I don’t remember the exact dialog, but it goes something like “The Emperor is very displeased with your progress on the Death Star.” The manager gasps and responds, “we.... we will redouble our efforts!”. I must admit, I’ve always felt sorry for that guy. Let’s face it; at one time or another, we’ve all found ourselves telling a boss, creditor, spouse, or judge “we.... we will redouble our efforts!” We elevated this to an artform when we were drinking. In fact, that’s probably what most of us were telling someone on the way to our first meeting.

Even though I have been sober a while, I still sometimes can really

relate to my Imperial friend. In my case, this usually happens on the job and usually after I have been operating in “my will not thine be done” mode for a while. At my job, we usually don’t need to be too concerned about management crushing our windpipes using Jedi powers. At the same time, I can still get into a world of trouble. If I am not actively trying to do God’s will.

We never really do find out why the Death Star was so far behind schedule. Did a salesman at Death Ray Solutions® promise a weapon that could obliterate planets from ten light years away without telling our unfortunate manager that this performance was based on lab tests using cubic planets, and that the range was only one light year on spherical ones? Maybe most of the construction crew was in the habit going to the Death Star Bar for lunch and never making it back. Then again, maybe the manager was given someone to work with like “George”.

George and I had to work together on a project once. I don’t believe George was an alcoholic, but he did have our genius for taking the simple and making it waaaaaay more complex than was necessary. He combined this with a photographic memory and an attention to detail normally associated with watchmakers and bomb disposal technicians. Finally, “compromise” was not a concept in his worldview. I should note that I was not George’s boss; we had to figure out how to work together as equals. We were working on a project I thought could easily be done in three months. I was mistaken.

One Monday morning, I had a meeting with George. “We need to place an order for the ¾ inch widgets by Friday in order to meet our deadline”, I said. “Are you going to be able to give Purchasing authorization to place an order for these by Thursday?”

“It’s going to be tight. I still have not gotten North American Widget to give us a color swatch for the boxes these will come in, and I cannot authorize a purchase until that is properly documented in our system.”

“We throw out the box after we get the widgets, George. Who cares what color the box is? Also, we’ve been purchasing ½ inch widgets without that documentation for years. We really need to get these on order”.

“In March of 2008 we adopted Purchasing Directive #5777 that absolutely requires packaging color to be documented in our specification *before* a Purchase order is placed. Everyone around here just ignores this.”

I was starting to become a tad annoyed. “In 2008 we were sending the widgets to our customers in the original box. That directive is not even a little applicable to what we are doing now”.

“What is the point of writing directives like #5777 if we just ignore them when it is inconvenient?”

At that point, I remembered that the 10th Step calls for me to

promptly admit when I am wrong. “Sorry,” I said. “For a minute there I forgot that our primary purpose is to follow directives, *not actually accomplish anything*. My mistake”.

Sarcasm is wasted on George. Unfazed, he made some notes in tiny block lettering in his date book. “I have a meeting with my boss tomorrow to allocate my time to various projects this week”, he said matter-of-factly. “This is only a priority 5B project, but I will do the best I can to get the ¾ inch widgets released by Thursday”.

On Tuesday morning, I woke up at 4:37 a.m. because sometimes, especially when I have something weighing on my conscience, I just wake up at 4:37 a.m. An hour and a half later my alarm went off, so I gave up on trying to get back to sleep.

I gave George a call and apologized properly this time. I did not say “I’m sorry I was such a #@%\$ yesterday, but you were being an anal-retentive ninny”. I did not even say “I’m sorry I was such a #@%\$ yesterday, but I was just worried about getting this project done in time”. No, what I said was simply “I’m sorry I was such a #@%\$ yesterday”.

His response was typical for George. “Paul, no need to apologize. What I heard yesterday was two conscientious people having a spirited discussion about the best way to do things”. George was too generous. The second part of that may be true, but I was still a #@%\$ and practicing this program requires me to look at where I was at fault:

Like many of our kind, I am good at telling others what to do, while hating to be told what to do. I bristle at other’s “directives”, while being a prolific author of them. A lot of this comes down to Pride.

At times I have (with justification) been accused of being an “anal-retentive ninny”. My disease loves to point to others I perceive as having this defect to a greater extent.

It is *just possible*, that following “Directive 5777” was appropriate. Maybe - just maybe – there were reasons this requirement was put in place of which I had not considered. When I am not working this program, what Paul thinks is important becomes the only thing that is important.

Pride, and to a lesser extent fear of loss of financial security, were at least partly behind the urgency I felt to complete this project on time.

One thing I should have pointed out far earlier in this article: the construction and/or use of Death Stars is most definitely not in keeping with the principles of the program. If you are currently thinking that either sounds like a good idea, call your sponsor immediately.

-Paul S

GOD DOING FOR ME...

Hi everyone, my name is Wayne and yes, I am definitely an alcoholic. Some years back, I was at the end of my rope and had no where to turn for help. That is when my God stepped into my life and opened my eyes. I assure you I would not have thought of God entering my life at that time. If anything, I thought my life coming apart was God’s fault, but because He is a loving God, he never gave up on me.

At that time I didn’t realize that there was a God and, if there was a God, why would he allow all these bad things happen to me. I realized later, he did these things to open my eyes. Without suspecting a thing, he was leading me into a better life. The more I opened my eyes and accepted the things in my life, the sooner my life got better (believe me it wasn’t over night).

I began to realize the harder I worked for something the more I appreciated it.

Once I bought God and the fellowship into my life, my life got better, and it has gotten better ever since. If I wrote down what I would be satisfied to get out of life, I would have cheated myself immensely - would never have pictured living the life I have presently. You see, as I am writing this, this ex-gutter drunk is sitting in my living room looking out the sliding glass doors at the ocean - never did I dream this could happen.

Don’t get me wrong, the promises I have received by turning my life over to God is not only about monetary things (very small part), but I have grown spiritually, emotionally, physically, and only God know how else since giving up that tragic life for my new, loving life.

I have God, you people, and the fellowship to thank for this. Stay safe - stay sober - God bless - I love you all.

-Wayne



DON'T REST ON YOUR LAURELS, GET BUSY

GET READY *Are YOU Ready?!!*

2020-2021 55th Annual
Area 45 Convention
March 19 & 20, 2021

Go to any Length
REGISTRATION OPENS
on JANUARY 10, 2021

<https://area45convention.org>

Registration IS required
**** Free ****
We suggest a contribution to offset our costs
** Speakers * Workshops * Merchandise * Entertainment **

We sincerely appreciate your support during this critical time.

DISTRICTS 15, 16, & 17 PRESENT:

Hope Within

CARRYING THE AA MESSAGE INTO PRISONS WORKSHOP

Speakers 1:00 - 3:00:
 Shirl R.
 Kacie R.
 Steve H.
 Steve H. Sr.

April 18, 2021

From: 1:00pm - 5:00pm

In person at:
 Enlightened Solutions
 600 S. Odessa Ave.
 Egg Harbor City, NJ

Learn how your Home Group can sponsor inmates with GRAPEVINE subscriptions

Volunteer Application Form
 Registration 3:00 - 5:00
 Must have valid ID with you

Or on ZOOM from 1-3pm
 ID# 973 671 2008
 Password: Workshop

Individually wrapped snacks/H2O

MUST WEAR A MASK
THIS IS A SOCIALLY DISTANT EVENT
CHAIRS AND TABLES WILL BE SET 6FT APART

Please Join District 26

for a virtual workshop ~

The AA Traditions Keep AA Safe From Me~

Date: March 27, 2021

Time: 12:00 - 1:30pm

Where: Zoom ID: 886 1804 8764

Passcode: checklist

Your Hostess, Lisa B, Alternate DCM District 26, along with Ken T., Area 45 Alternate Del, presenting:

The History of our Traditions.

Peg I. DCM, District 10: will be reading the Traditions. We will be using the Traditions Check List as our guide. We will briefly look at each Tradition, listed questions on the checklist, then ask ourselves how we live them in and out of AA. Bring your questions! Let's get curious about our TRADITIONS!

Saturday Early Risers (Men) ALL ARE WELCOME

14th Group Anniversary

Saturday April 17th.

7am online and in-person.

FELLOWSHIP COMMUNITY CHURCH

710 W Collings Avenue, Collingswood

Zoom Meeting

Meeting ID: 834 0285 2952

Meeting Password: 537258

SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Answering Service

Several volunteers are looking to end their service and will stay on until we have replacements. Days and times needed:

Monday: 4-6 pm
Wednesday: 6-8 pm and 8-10 pm
Thursday: 10am-12 pm.

As meetings begin to open and people willing to meet others one-on-one; please continue to remind everyone that more volunteers are need for the 12-step list. Areas we need most help: Berlin, Camden, Hammonton, and Salem. We have signup sheets available for anyone wishing to take a copy to their home groups. If you know anyone who would like to be of service, please have them contact us at answering-service@aa-sj.org or invite us to speak at your home group.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Anonymous South Jersey is a monthly newsletter published by and for members of South Jersey Alcoholics Anonymous. Opinions expressed herein are NOT to be attributed to AA as a whole, nor does publication of information imply any endorsement by either AA or South Jersey Intergroup. Quotations and artwork from AA literature are printed with permission from AA World Services, Inc., and/or the AA Grapevine, Inc.

Contributions from readers are encouraged—you can write about your experience, strength and hope in general, or you can focus on one of the steps or traditions. You can also write about something that touched you at a meeting, something that bothered you at a meeting, or some service commitment you especially enjoy. Submissions are sometimes edited for space and clarity. Contact information is required and anonymity is respected.

Use your imagination or use one of the following topics: Beginners, Young People, My Best Advice in AA, Recovery in the Time of Coronavirus. You can also send us information on your group's anniversary or other event.

Write one yourself or ask a sponsee or friend to write, as well.

No time to proofread, no worries. Our editing team will fix it up in a jiffy!

PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR ARTICLE IN WORD, PUBLISHER OR A GOOGLE DOC.

Artists: Send some original paintings, drawings or photography (no photos of faces please in keeping with tradition.)

Due to space limitations, we are sometimes unable to publish flyers for events in this newsletter. However, we are happy to include your gathering in the general list of fellowship announcements.

Please send your submissions to newsletter@aa-sj.org.

We need you!

Please ask your...
sponsees,
homegroup members,
newcomers,
old-timers
to write articles for us!



Staying Sober During a Pandemic-

it's Odd and God

My life was changing. I managed to get through Christmas, New Years, and the Super Bowl without relapsing this year and I thought "This is going to be a good year. Twenty-twenty will be MY year." And just like that- before you could say the serenity prayer- I was surrounded by situations that I couldn't change.

It was the first week of March in New Jersey, 2020 and I was in a new building for work. It was the first day of my new role after the promotion. I trained that week and made some friends with my teammates and others in the training classes. After work, I'd get on the train and return home to go to a meeting and then back to my parent's house (even though I had lived there for 5 years post-graduation from College it still didn't quite feel like home). In the meetings I read and shared was open to advise from my support group who at this time felt like two dozen men. There were whispers of a virus spreading throughout Asia and Europe and we still felt protected- things like that didn't happen in America anymore. Then it happened.

The morning of March 6th, I was instructed to bring my phone and laptop home and I was to begin working from home effective the following Monday (March 9th). I worked from home for that week, and attended my meetings, and the atmosphere before and after the meetings had changed that week. Fear was setting in. The Fight or Flight had set in. Some began talking about meetings being banned along with other things in the state and about alternatives to in-person meetings. Others were in denial and could not fathom a life without meetings. I must admit I did not think alcoholics would stop meeting entirely, and I was scared for my sobriety because at my meetings I was able to get all of the tools AA has given me within the span of an hour. Meetings gave me the fellowship, literature, and the messages that I needed to get another night without alcohol. People started talking about Zoom meetings, and my homegroup created an account so that we could keep carrying the message. We announced it at every opportunity.

The state of Emergency was declared. We were ready for it. Zoom became the primary mode of transmission for the message of Strength and Hope. I began calling people that I used to see weekly just to keep in touch and have more intimate conversations than what is possible on Zoom with 20 other people. It became clear to me after about 2 months of leading my homegroup every Tuesday and attending about 4 other meetings regularly that I was not getting enough out of my meetings for the first time in my sobriety. I needed something more. My program was lacking something. It was time to return to basics and diagnose what was missing.

I determined the cause of my malady was a lack of a spiritual connection. I used to get that connection in a room full of people but that wasn't transmitted through an internet connection. It was time to step up my 11th step practice and communicate with my Higher Power in a way I had not done in a long time. I started to pray more and say "Thank you" when good things happened in my life. Things that were out of my control- and that I REALIZED were out of my control. My prayer practice had changed. I had learned the meaning of the phrase "Thy will—not mine—be done" and I had become comfortable in allowing events to unfold without manipulation. I started praying for God's will rather than my own. I desperately hoped that the two would align but became comfortable with the idea that there may be experiences that I am destined to have, and those experiences may not come from the things that I want in the moment. I now was able to see my Higher Power as a benevolent source, not an absent or spiteful one.

As the months passed and the weather warmed, outdoor meetings were cropping up here and there, and it was an opportunity to don a mask, grab a beach chair, and have a somewhat modified meeting reminiscent of 2019 (except that the bathrooms were locked, there was no coffee scent, and we were in parking lots, town parks, and members' back yards). We showed up early, we stayed late, we were able to talk to one another from a safe distance, and we thought things would be returning to normal. Some meetings even opened back up indoors. Maximum attendance standards were in place, and social distancing was paramount. Some of us could meet at a restaurant before the meeting and regain some of that fellowship. Some new faces were seen at these meetings and were there week after week. I felt like an active member once again. I stayed sober by God's Grace and was able to save up some money and move into an apartment overlooking the river.

As time has elapsed, and the weather has turned cold again. Our restrictions have been tightened once again, and the primary source of meetings is online once again. I no longer fear what will happen next. I have rekindled an aspect of my sobriety in a way that I would not have thought possible. It would not have been possible if I had not been fox-holed into it. I still attend meetings online and outside and listen to AA Speaker Tapes when I can't make it to a meeting, and I pray and meditate daily. Many tragic things have happened over the past 10 months on a global scale; but thanks to AA, the fellowship, and a renewed understanding of my Higher Power I am not paralyzed with fear. I pray for God's will and the willingness to accept it gracefully without fear.

-Rob



MARCH HISTORY IN ALCHOLICS ANONYMOUS

March 21, 1881: Anne Ripley, Dr. Bob's wife, was born.

March 4, 1891: Lois Wilson was born.

March 25, 1898: Jim B. ("The Vicious Cycle") was born

March 23, 1936: Bill & Lois Wilson visited Fitz Mayo, "Our Southern Friend," in Maryland.

March 1, 1939: Readers Digest failed to write promised article on AA.

March 7, 1940: Bill and Lois visited the Philadelphia AA group.

March 12, 1940: Ebby Thatcher, Bill Wilson's boyhood friend and sponsor, was reported sober again.

March 16, 1940: Bill moved the Alcoholic Foundation office to 30 Vesey St., NY. (30 Vesey St., NY, was almost destroyed on September 11, 2001.)

March, 1941: 1st Prison AA Group formed at San Quentin.

March 1, 1941: Saturday Evening Post article by Jack Alexander created national sensation. AA membership quadrupled in one year from 2000 to 8000.

March 14, 1941: South Orange, NJ, AA held an anniversary dinner at the Hotel Suburban with Bill Wilson as the guest speaker.

March 10, 1944: New York Intergroup was established.

March 5, 1945: Time Magazine reported Detroit radio broadcasts of AA members.

March 3, 1947: Nell Wing, Bill's secretary and first archivist of AA, began her career at Alcoholic Foundation Office at 415 Lexington Avenue.

March 31, 1947: 1st AA group was formed in London, England.

March 22, 1951: Dr. William Duncan Silkworth died at Towns Hospital

March 25, 1965: Richmond Walker, author of "Twenty-Four Hours a Day" book, died at age 72, almost 23 years sober.

March 21, 1966: Ebby Thatcher, Bill Wilson's sponsor, died

sober.

March 22, 1984: Clarence Snyder, founder of Cleveland AA and author of "Home Brewmeister," died at 81, 46 years sober.

Group Histories

Do you know your group's history? Your group's history is an important part of the growth of AA in southern New Jersey. The Archive Committee of South Jersey Intergroup is collecting the histories of the groups in our area. Why not download our group history questionnaire located at <https://aasj.org/resources-page/archives/> and submit it to Archive@aasj.org.

The Archive Committee organizes and stores historic materials regarding the South Jersey Intergroup. We gather histories of the groups and Old-timers for our area. If you have historic documents/literature to donate or would like to be interviewed about your group's story or your own personal story, please email us at archives@aasj.org

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of each individual and do not necessarily represent the opinions or policy of South Jersey Intergroup or AA as a whole.

