

Bill W – On Freedom and Thoroughness in AA

I cannot urge too much upon you the need for thoroughness in all that you do. Particularly in the practice of AA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. No doubt many of you will say as many do here "These principles are too many, and they are too difficult; we can do well with only a few. If each of us for example admits that he is an alcoholic, and tries to carry the message to others perhaps that will be enough." Hence Step One and Step Twelve will be sufficient. Or as AA Groups we may say "Surely our fellowship should be open to all newcomers, surely we should place no one in personal authority over us, and most surely we should never compel any to pay fees or dues. But these will be Traditions enough; as for the other Steps and Traditions perhaps we can forget them or change them to suit our needs here."

Now I would be the very first to urge that every AA member and individual has a perfect right as he so chooses to practice our Steps and Traditions in just this fashion. In AA it is a

well settled principle that all of us, individuals and groups, may practice the program exactly as we like. We can still be AA members even if we disagree with the entire program. Our charter for individual and group liberty is just as broad as that. It leaves each of us in a position to try for sobriety and a better life in any way we think will be good for us.

I must make haste to say that a great many of us still look at the Steps and Traditions in just this way. When some of the principles appear too difficult or when they appear to be unnecessary we simply pass them by. Some go even further. We declare that some of the Steps and Traditions are quite wrong and ought to be changed. Up to a certain point these attitudes are healthy because liberty of thought and action is a very precious thing too.

But it also has to be remembered that in thousands of groups and in tens of thousands of AA members the thorough practice of AA's Steps and Traditions has invariably produced by far the better result. Nor, is it yet on the record that

anyone has been harmed by being thorough and by giving AA's Twelve Steps and Traditions a really fair and continuous trial. Naturally enough many will still say "But we can't try all the Steps and all the Traditions because we don't believe that some of them are true. For example we cannot believe in God or even a Power Greater than Ourselves.

For many a newcomer this is the worst stumbling block of all of the Twelve Steps. Yet, experience shows that this need not be so. Of course it is perfectly true that no one can demand of himself that he believe in God or in somebody else's version of God. This is something he simply cannot do; at least for the moment. But no such person need be discouraged as our experience well shows. Actually every single one of us is capable of believing in some sort of Higher Power. One can for example surely believe that his own AA Group is a Higher Power.

If Ones AA Group represents more sobriety and more happiness than the newcomer has then that group is certainly a Higher Power. For the time being the Higher Power can be the

newcomers own group and his group is certainly something he can depend upon. We have happily discovered that when a newcomer commences to take this attitude and becomes willing practice the rest of the Twelve Steps the result is almost always excellent. At the end of a few months of such an open-minded effort or after a year at most our friend finds him self not only sober but so transformed in his own personal life that he realizes that neither he nor his group could without God have accomplished such a miracle of change.

At this point our friend begins to talk about God as I Understand Him. Such a newcomer is well on the road to spiritual progress, to a far more secure sobriety, and to a life better than any to which he dreamed before. Willingness and open-mindedness are his tools. They invariably open the door to faith. So it goes with all the Twelve Steps. If we will only try them all with an open mind and keep on trying the results are certain to be great.

Excerpt from Prepared Statement by Bill W.

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