

DISCUSSION TOPIC: BACK TO BASICS (April, 1976)

Are we, in the content of our A.A. meetings, getting away from basics? Are we talking about our own recovery from alcoholism, the Big Book, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions?

(Bob Bacon - Delegate, Northeast Ohio) (Excerpts from his talk)

My name is Bob Bacon. I am powerless over alcohol and very grateful to be alive and a part of this conference.

Are we, in the content of our A.A. meetings, getting away from A.A. basics? I believe we are. Alcoholics Anonymous is growing at a faster rate than at any time since the '40's, and I suspect we were not ready for such growth. Have we gotten a little complacent and smug in our well-being? People today are coming to Alcoholics Anonymous in far better shape physically and mentally than most of us here did. We need to show them how we learned to stay sober. If our meetings consist mostly of drinking experiences, our ideas and opinions, we are not doing our jobs. Dr. Bob said our program when boiled down, is love and service.

We need to show all the newcomers that we love them as we were loved and we have a way of life we wish to share. If our meetings are nothing but drunk-a-logs and meaningless chatter, we are not showing them "How It Works". In A.A. meetings, we reach out with love and told people, "These are the Steps we took" and "We had to go to any lengths". Is that what the newcomer is hearing in our meetings today?

When a person comes to us after 30 days in a rehabilitation center, he or she is already dry and needs to know how we are staying sober. I believe our meetings are not really covering this heavy responsibility as effectively as we should and could. We do have some good news, such as Big Book Study Meetings. More and more in my area, we are going to discussion meetings. This new idea is from the Grapevine.

To me, it is vital to the survival of our Fellowship that we make certain the people coming to us for help are made aware of the Big Book, the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions as possibly their only hope for survival from alcoholism. If we fail to guide them to our program of recovery, our Fellowship will not survive. Our future is dependent upon a continuing stream of recovered alcoholics.

In today's frustrating world, our Program works better than ever. Are we doing a good enough job sharing this with the thousands of people coming to us now? Shouldn't we be giving these people all Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service? We have to tell them more than, "Don't drink and go to meetings". If all we talk about is our drinking, our ideas, our opinions, my day or the way I do it, we are not carrying the message--we are carrying the illness. We should be talking about recovery. I don't believe we are.

Are we stressing the real value of the Big Book? You can go to meetings in my area where you can't find a Big Book. Lately, when I am asked to lead a meeting, I have to take my Big Book with me. I don't want to lead a meeting that doesn't have a Big Book. We hear many people lead meetings and never mention the Steps or the Big Book. Is it because nobody told them how very important the Big Book is? Do we forget to tell the newcomer that what is in the Big Book can save his or her life? Our total Program is in the Big Book and only in the Big Book. Shouldn't we be telling people that?

We hear a lot of ridiculous things like, "There are no musts in A.A." My Big Book read different. People say that it is an individual program, that we can take the Steps any way we want to. Dr. Bob said, and I quote, "There is no such thing as an individual interpretation of the Twelve Steps." If we are not honest with the new people and tell them how important each Step is, who will tell them? Some people seem to think the Steps are a necessary evil instead of a lifesaving prescription for happiness.

We rarely hear about the Traditions. The fact that these came about because of our mistakes and failures is almost a secret. The Traditions are the lifesaving guide lines for each group and for our Fellowship as a whole and each of us should be responsible to honor them. When I first wanted to get a copy of the "Twelve and Twelve", a G.S.R. told me the Tradition pamphlet had all I needed. Thank God, I didn't listen to him.

In 1965 at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto, most of us stood with Bill and said, "I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there and for that I am responsible." Being at that Convention is the reason I am standing here now. We are the guardians of this Fellowship, and maybe we need to do a better job of sharing what it is all about. Are we still responsible?