

NOT GROUP THERAPY

I have attended AA-meetings for 15 years, but in the past few years I've left many meetings with an uncomfortable feeling. Why did I feel disturbed? What had happened? I unearthed the answer to those questions at a popular lunch meeting I had been urged to attend.

A woman at this standing-room-only meeting began to talk about her mother and the damage her mother had caused in her life. She wept and damned her mother and blamed her for all of her unhappiness. There was no talk of sobriety. No hint of gratitude. No reference to working the Steps. Then this woman left the meeting early. I wanted to stop her and bring her back and tell her to listen. She just might find the answer to her problems. At that moment, I realized with disturbing clarity that that was group therapy, not an AA-meeting. What I had just been part of was what I believe to be the subtle sabotage of the AA-program. This woman was just one of many people who are misguidedly using meetings to dump her feelings and resentments in the name of sharing.

My intention is not to minimize anyone's grief. I speak as one who grew up in an extremely abusive alcoholic family, as a man who is a Vietnam Vet, a survivor of divorce and other traumatic losses. I have attended therapy at various times and found it quite useful. However, I don't confuse therapy with AA's Twelve Steps and am disturbed as I see people increasingly using AA-meetings for free therapy, in order to get in touch with their feelings. My own primary purpose at a meeting is to better learn to apply the AA Twelve Step philosophy to the problems of daily life.

This intrusion of therapy talk in meeting causes a loss of focus on what this Program is all about. The basic principles of recovery, honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness are being replaced with self-absorption, attention-getting, and getting in touch with feelings. Instead of enlisting the principles of gratitude and acceptance, many are focusing on blame in the name of sharing feelings. The Big Book states, acceptance is the answer to all of my problems today.

That simple principle, acceptance, is what we are neglecting when we allow meeting to become therapy. I hear people who've been around the program for over a year still working on a problem and then blaming their unhappiness on this still unresolved problem. People are blaming everything that's not going right in their lives on their ex-spouses, lousy parents, the Government, or their bosses. Less time needs to be spent on complaining about the problem and more time needs to be focussed on solutions. The solutions live in the application of the Twelve Steps.

Acceptance is the answer to all of my problems today. As long as people are blaming, they're not working the Twelve Steps. And as long as they're not working the Twelve Steps, they will continue to use meetings as therapy, they will continue to dilute the higher purpose of this Program, which is to share our experience, strength, and hope. Let's work the Steps and keep the therapy talk out. We know how it works.

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