



# ALKI-LINE



TAKE ONE, IT'S FREE

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## The Next Wave

A surge is coming and I'm not talking about a second wave of COVID-19. I am talking about the future newcomers to A.A. The pandemic has been a perfect storm for those suffering from substance use and mental health issues. I have no doubt that when physical meetings start back up, we will see an increase in membership akin to gym memberships after New Year's. The sheltering at home orders and state lockdowns have led to the shuttering of meeting locations across the world. Walking in to your first A.A. meeting is a difficult feat during the best of times and that difficulty is only exacerbated when there is no threshold to cross and access to treatment is reduced. So, what can we do to prepare for an influx of newcomers? I know what I'm doing: I'm doing what I can to make sure that I'm around to reach out my hand. For me, that's meant starting virtual meetings and attending meetings others have started. I can honestly say I've attended more meetings per week since the pandemic began. It has also meant that working with other alcoholics hasn't stopped. I meet with another weekly, online to go through *Drop the Rock*, which is about Steps 6 & 7. I've taken a sponsee through the first three steps and am eagerly awaiting his finished 4th Step. I've upped the calls to my sponsor and made it a point to reach out to other alcoholics via the phone. I've also doubled down on prayer and meditation. When we return to physical meetings, I want to be sure that I'm there with my hand out to the newcomers who will be looking for the solution to their problem, a solution that only those in A.A. can seemingly provide. In preparation for that day, I've done the same things that have kept me sober since 1989: when anyone, anywhere, reaches out their hand, I want the hand of A. A. to always be there and for that, I am responsible.

—Keith B., Andover

## La Siguiente Ola

Se aproxima una siguiente ola y no estoy hablando de una segunda ola del COVID-19, estoy hablando de futuros principiantes a A.A. La pandemia ha sido la tormenta perfecta para aquellos sufriendo del uso de sustancias y problemas de salud mental. No tengo duda de que cuando las reuniones físicas comiencen nuevamente, veremos un aumento en la membresía similar a las membresías en los gimnasios después del año nuevo. Las ordenes de quedarse en casa y los cierres de los estados han llevado a los cierres de lugares de reuniones alrededor del mundo. Entrar a tu primera reunión de A.A. es una proeza difícil durante en el mejor de los casos y esa dificultad solamente se complica más cuando no hay un umbral para cruzar y se reduce el acceso al tratamiento. Entonces, ¿qué podemos hacer para prepararnos para un influjo de principiantes? Yo sé lo que yo estoy haciendo: estoy haciendo lo que pueda para asegurarme de que estaré ahí para extender mi mano. Para mí, ha significado empezar reuniones virtuales y asistir a reuniones que otros han empezado. Honestamente puedo decir que he asistido a más reuniones por semana desde que empezó la pandemia. También ha significado que el trabajar con otros alcohólicos no se ha detenido. Me reúno con otro semanalmente, en línea para repasar “como botar la carga”, que se trata de los Pasos 6 & 7. He encaminado a un ahijado a través de los primeros tres Pasos y ansiosamente estoy esperando que termine su 4º Paso. He aumentado las llamadas a mi padrino y me he dado a la tarea de contactar a otros alcohólicos vía telefónica. También he duplicado las oraciones y meditaciones. Cuando regresemos a las reuniones físicas, quiero asegurarme de estar ahí con mi mano extendida para los principiantes que estarán buscando la solución a su problema, una solución que aparentemente solo aquellos en A.A. pueden ofrecer. En preparación para ese día, he hecho las mismas cosas que me han mantenido sobrio desde 1989: cuando cualquiera, dondequiera, extiende su mano pidiendo ayuda, quiero que la mano de A.A. siempre esté allí. Y por esto: Yo soy responsable.

—Keith B., Andover



## Can Alcoholics Save the World?

It doesn't take much more than a glance to see that today's society is more fractured, divided and full of inequity than any time in recent memory. I've often heard it said that everyone on Earth could use a 12-Step program as a guide to living. I believe that the recovery community's response to the current public health crisis has illuminated its adaptability, resilience, resourcefulness, strength, and diversity. As a person in recovery, I learned pretty early on that my survival was dependent on seemingly simple concepts that were absolutely critical if my intention was sustainable long-term recovery from alcoholism. The first was unity. Singularity of purpose has put me into deeply meaningful relationships with individuals whose ideas of spirituality and politics are vastly different than my own and yet, my very life depends upon that special tie that binds us in a far more powerful way. Our code of love and tolerance as people in recovery from a chronic illness demands humility, civility and unity for the purpose of our mutual growth in serenity and capacity to support those who still suffer.

Does the alcoholic, the lowest of the low, scorned and vilified seemingly from the day that Bacchus first crushed grapes, have the key to healing our currently careening out of control world? Is it not unlike all of the other apparent paradoxes having to do with sobriety such as "surrender to win" and "give it away to keep it"? Nonsense you say?

I think not.

Who better than those of us who have learned through bitter experience that humility and gratitude are the pathways to peace to role model civility, unity and compassion? The recovery community by whose very nature exists and thrives through sharing our experience, strength and hope holds a sacred obligation to use the prescient, life-saving lessons it has learned as a balm to heal a suffering world.

—John S.

## An A.A. Group or Just a Meeting?

What makes a group? What are the primary requirements that need to be met to establish a group? Registering with GSO and getting a group number is a good start. Electing a GSR to represent the group at the district or intergroup is important. Following A.A. traditions is vital to health and longevity. Are regular business meetings held where all members are heard from and listened to? Does the meeting focus on the Twelve Steps of A.A.? Is the group's primary purpose to carry the message to the alcoholic that still suffers? Does the group collect money from its members? Is it careful not to take donations from non-members who may be in attendance? Does it send any funds in excess of their determined prudent reserve to GSO, intergroup, district and

area? Is the Preamble read? How It Works? The Promises? The Traditions? The anonymity statement? Is non-conference approved literature read, displayed or sold? Is there a secretary? Is the spirit of rotation adhered to? Are the meetings inclusive? What about people with other addictions? Are they welcome to share their experience, strength and hope? Is there a raffle? Does the group donate money to outside entities?

I'm sure there are a myriad of other valid and important questions for a new group to consider. Many groups start with just a resentment and a coffee pot. (Will tea drinkers be welcome?). Many times a group starts with very little consideration given to any of these questions.

Why do some meetings wither and others flourish? Is it because these meetings learn the lessons needed to become a group? Maybe those that follow the Traditions rigorously have a longer history. Maybe it's fulfilling a need. Maybe a higher power has a hand in it. It's probably a mixture.

We could also wonder why some members come to their first meeting and remain sober for a lifetime, while others relapse many times before getting sober. Sadly, some never recover. Maybe those people attended meetings but not solid groups.

The truth is there is no difference between a group and "just a meeting", as addressed in the long form of Tradition Three. "Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group they have no other affiliation." There is very little written about what constitutes a group, but this simple sentence is all the guidance we have or need. If two alcoholics meet by telephone, internet or smoke signal just once a year or once a week, they may call themselves a group.

There is a caveat. The group should be meeting only to keep sober, and have no other affiliation. Fortunately or unfortunately, A.A. gives us autonomy in Tradition Four. Thus, they are free to conduct themselves as they please, even if it affects other groups or A.A. as a whole. There is no governing body that can require any group to behave a certain way, just as there is no person in A.A. that can compel another member to do anything. I contend that if a group is not following spiritual guidelines it will inevitably close.

I would suggest that before anyone dismiss another group as "just a meeting" they invest the time and effort into a group inventory of their own home group to learn how it might better adhere to Tradition Five.

—Charlie F.



## Self-will: At What Cost?

Like some of you, I have experienced the ultimate cost of self-will in a very personal way: death of a loved one. Some months ago, I shared in these pages the tragic loss of my son, Donald, in what I judge was an accidental suicide. He was in Bangkok, Thailand when he fell from a balcony. Was he on vacation as some think? Was he running away from his alcoholic life? Was he on a spiritual quest for a higher power? I ask, but so far no reply.

Sadly, I was the last person to see him two weeks before his death. At that time, we spoke of my sobriety, the yielding of self-will, and how my Higher Power works in my life. When I look back at our conversation in the psychiatric ward of the hospital, it's my guess that he was just thinking of getting out and getting a drink. It seemed as if he couldn't wait to get back to his apartment and for me to get back on the plane home.

I remember when all I thought about was my next drink. The rapacious nature of alcohol was consuming me. I repeated Step One over and over, always crying out that I could not stop drinking and that my own life was unmanageable. And then came Step Two, become willing . . . a power greater than ourselves. This was the stone wall my son kept running into. He told me he could not find a rational reason to believe in a god, a higher power. He felt convinced that he should be able to use his intellect, his self-will to stop his drinking. During the same conversation he also mentioned an interest in Buddhism. Perhaps this was what he was seeking in Thailand.

Was I afraid of giving up my self-will as I came into Steps Two and Three? You bet. Alcohol was my Linus Blanket. I wanted to sit in the corner, hold my blanket and suck on my bottle. Like Linus, Lucy would come along and snatch his blanket away . . . like me ending up in the ER. Perhaps one day Linus will lay down his blanket, one day at a time. That is all my Higher Power asks of me. It asks nothing too difficult. Just don't have a drink today. Tomorrow is the future, one day away.

I sometimes agonize over that conversation I had with my son in the hospital. In searching my soul I don't know how or if I could have made a difference in his choices. I could neither make him drink, nor make him sober. I did what was in my heart and to share about my sober life. My higher power, God, asks only that we be there for each other and share our lives in sobriety. In the process, we learn to yield our self-will to Him. The cost of keeping my self-will? It's too high.

—Al Di.

## How Many Coins?

I came into sobriety in the eighth decade of my life. How did I survive almost sixty years of drinking? I guess I was lucky or just not serious enough about my drinking. I told myself that I was not an "alcoholic", just a "heavy drinker" at times. So why quit? I wasn't doing any harm. Or so I thought at the time.

A lifetime ago, I was depressed; feeling at the end of my life; waiting for open heart surgery, and on and on. One evening when I was slugging down 100 proof whiskey, I ended up in the hospital. Family members found me on the bedroom floor. I was later told it was an attempted suicide. In addition to alcohol, I had ingested sleeping pills. How would I know, I wasn't there: I was in a blackout. Want to hear more of my excuses for drinking? I didn't think so.

Leading up to this slice of mayhem, I was drinking and going to A.A. meetings. Finally, and to quote the A.A. Promises: "God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves." The God of my understanding stepped in and did for me what I could not do for myself. It happened and continues to happen, one day at a time – that is my personal moto: One Day at a Time. I have a bumper sticker to prove it.

Sometimes I read the obituaries to see how lucky I still am. God has blessed me with health and a zest for life: a life I can still remember now - not hazy, in a black-out or sleeping it off. Looking back it pains me to realize what I had thrown away along with the empty bottles.

At a recent A.A. meeting I shared that I had lost all those years of my children growing up; a failed marriage of twenty-six years; and widowed after twenty-two years with a second marriage. At this juncture of my life, I am working to restore the broken relationships with my children. I have a wonderful partner who can share my personal space. Life is good, it's all good.

As I approach my expiration date, I do so with joy and the expectation that my journey in sobriety will be one of continued growth with my loved ones and the A.A. community. Along the way I plan to continue collecting coins. Now let's see, how many coins will that be?

—Al Di.

## Me, Myself and I

As I journey from alcoholism to sobriety, this phrase has real meaning for me. Here's why, in my last-ditch effort for sobriety, I went into therapy. In the first session, I was asked what I wanted to accomplish. I replied, "I want to know why I drink." I thought that if I understood why I drank, I could control my drinking and get on with my life. His reply was disappointing, "I can't answer that question, but we can



begin to discover who Al is." Hmm, I thought I knew who Al was.

Although therapy may not be for everyone, it certainly was helpful in my journey in sobriety. The weeks and months with my addiction counselor (also an alcoholic) rolled by. He encouraged me to share my life, my pain, and my behind-the-scenes emotions. I found out the only way therapy worked for me, was to be totally honest. (Ow, that hurts). I learned not to hold back. Some sessions I had been drinking. Other times I was sober. Finally, there came a time when I had been sober for more than a few weeks. At that point, I was able to tell him my deepest emotion: my huge insecurity that I covered up with an even bigger ego. Soon I began to see myself in a new light. I wasn't too sure I liked what I saw. (Self-flagellation was in season). As the sessions moved from surface stuff to deeper emotional stuff, I began to heal. I began to feel whole. I saw a hint of who I wanted to be. I also heard in the rooms that I should focus on who I want to be, regardless of where I am now. "Now" is only a point of inflection, a turn in the road.

I liked the way the addiction counselor introduced the concept that there were three of "me". There is the "inner me" which is truly me and that I don't share with anyone. That's where my authentic feelings reside, such as cowardice and selfishness. Then, there is the "outer me", which is what I want other people see me as, funny, witty and educated. Those are some of the "masks" I wear to protect the inner me. And finally, there is the "observer me". It is how I judge my actions from the outside, more objectively.

As I allow the "observer me" to look at my behavior, I can perhaps change my actions. Then the "inner me" would undergo a bit of re-programming, and the "outer me" would hopefully change. The goal he told me, was to get the "inner me" and the "outer me" closer together. This meant that I had to be more honest with the people in my life.

While looking at my moral inventory in Step Four, the "observer me" helped me to figure out what the "inner me" was hiding. I could see a little more of what my deficiencies look like from the outside. The A.A. program promises me sobriety not lack of pain. Talking things out with my addiction counselor helped me to be more open with my sponsor as we did Step Five.

So, here I am: the three "me's". Each of "us", looking in three directions: in, out and around. "We" are now more aware of each other, and our roles in not just keeping Al sober, but also in leading a life of sobriety. **Me, myself and I** . . . one day at a time.

—Al Di.

## From the A.A. General Service Office

Physically Distanced but Digitally Connected:

A.A. in the digital age has certainly taken on a new meaning in these challenging times.

[https://www.aa.org/press-releases/en\\_US/no\\_page/physically-distanced-but-digitally-connected-the-alcoholics-anonymous-message-carries-on-amid-coronavirus-covid-19](https://www.aa.org/press-releases/en_US/no_page/physically-distanced-but-digitally-connected-the-alcoholics-anonymous-message-carries-on-amid-coronavirus-covid-19)

FAQ on Practicing the Seventh Tradition at Virtual Meetings:

For online groups or meetings wondering how to "pass the virtual basket" in order to practice the Seventh Tradition, this new service piece offers some shared experience to help answer frequently asked questions.

[https://www.aa.org/assets/en\\_US/SMF-223-FAQonVirtualBasket\\_en.pdf](https://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/SMF-223-FAQonVirtualBasket_en.pdf)

## Save the Date

**Please refer to [ct-aa.org](http://ct-aa.org) for information regarding state-wide recovery events and on-line meetings**

### We Want To Hear From You!

Share your stories, essays, articles, poetry, etc... with others through the Alki-Line. We are accepting submissions of one page or less:

**Email:** [alki-line@ct-aa.org](mailto:alki-line@ct-aa.org)

**Mail:** Alki-Line, P.O. Box 7060, Meriden, CT 06450

**Hand** material to a GSR

### ¡Queremos saber más de Usted!

Mándenos las historias personales, los ensayos, las opiniones, la poesía, etc... y entérenos más de usted en el Alki-Line. Se puede entregar una página o menos de las historias a una de los siguiente:

**Por el correos electrónicos:** [alki-line@ct-aa.org](mailto:alki-line@ct-aa.org)

**Por el correos:** Alki-Line, P.O. Box 7060, Meriden, CT 06450

**O De mano** a su GSR or Representativo de Alki-Line

### Alki-Line

This newsletter is by and for alcoholics; however, we review submissions by all interested in the A.A. program of recovery. Material may be edited for clarity and length. This newsletter and earlier issues can be downloaded at [www.ct-aa.org](http://www.ct-aa.org).

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