In this March issue: Step Three, Tradition Three, and Faith

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COIN Schedule of Topics

Topics in this Issue

Step Three

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

Tradition Three

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

Faith

Allegiance to duty, person, spirit, or God.

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Please email all submissions to coin@aasanjose.org

COIN Editor: Geena Louise R.

Sunlight of the Spirit Cover Art: Elizabeth M.

Central Office Executive Director: Jody W.
The Guilt and Shame of Alcoholism
The Peace and Happiness of Right Living

— Rick R.

Coming from a life of poverty in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the early 1940s I was conditioned by the environment that I was raised in. I did a lot of things I was not proud of as a youth. Had I known the consequences of those actions I might never have developed into an alcoholic but there was no way of changing the history of my youthful behavior.

I could blame it on my family environment, but then, who would my family get to blame their problems on? Coming from a family of 10 siblings, divorced parents, on welfare, and the absence of positive role models was not an easy thing to overcome. Most of my family drank excessively and by the age of 15, I was drinking right along with them which only broadened my sense of fear and insecurity that returned upon waking each morning.

I had the feeling that I would have to fend for myself if I were going to survive and at the young age of 17, I enlisted in the U. S. Navy and was removed from the undisciplined surroundings at home to a safe and disciplined environment aboard ship where all my needs were met so long as I was able of performing my duties. I advanced in rank rapidly, and I could continue my drinking habits in the off hours. The life of the fleet sailor would have been fine with me, but that all changed when I became a husband and a father. My marriage lasted only 11 months and I came home from sea to an empty unit in Navy housing and gone was my wife, my son, my car, and my dignity.

I continued drinking heavily for two more years and going through a divorce by correspondence, all over the Pacific. I started missing muster on board the ship and with the fear of losing my navy career I woke up one morning, called Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and found my first meeting. I arrived and was greeted by three empathetic members and within two minutes the obsession to
drink was gone and has never returned. Up to that moment in time I thought that I was responsible for all the shameful deeds of my past but as I got more familiar with the program, I came to understand that I was inflicted with the disease of Alcoholism long before I was capable understanding it.

As I got more familiar with the program, I found that I was not responsible for contracting that disease, but I was accountable for my behaviors and that I could be restored to a somewhat normal life if I was willing to revisit those selfish deeds and behaviors of the past and make restitution to those I harmed. This did not happen overnight. It took years of evolution just to understand this process and to reprogram my mind, adopting the habit of examining the motives for everything I do in my life and to practice unselfish principles concerning all my behavioral patterns. I liken it to a rock tumbler effect. Slowly but surely all the rough edges are worn away and I became the person I have always wanted to be.

The main obstacle that stood in the way of my progress was recognizing when my ego was running the show, as it often was, and living by the dictates of my conscience in all my decision making. Over a long period of time, living by these unselfish principles became second nature and as the result, most of my decisions are already made for me and principles are not flexible. I do these things without fanfare as to not bring attention to myself and the result has been a life of peace and happiness that never could have happened had I not desperately surrendered to the wonderful program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

**Step Three: Contributing to Life**

God makes it possible to shed selfishness. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without Her aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help.
This is the how and the why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our guide and mentor.

Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our own little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of Her presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn.

We were now at Step Three. Many of us said to our Higher Power, as we understood Her: “God, I offer myself to Thee to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!” We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Her.

We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person, such as our husband, best friend, or spiritual adviser. But it is better to meet God alone than with one who might misunderstand.

The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation. It is most important to be sincere, which may be best achieved with your own prayer words.

One A.A. member objects to phrases like “do with me as Thou wilt”; they remind her of her negative experiences in past relationships. Just by changing a few words, she makes this prayer more accessible and relevant for her.

“God, I open myself to you to work in my life today, according to divine hope for me. Remove me from the bondage of fear, shame, and low self-esteem that I
might become a channel for joy, love, and peace in the universe. Remove my difficulties as you see fit, so that victory over them would bear witness to those I would help of your love and power.”

This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once.

Step Three required a follow-up

— Rick R.

Early on in sobriety I considered the Third Step Prayer on page 63 as both a “decision” and “turning over” of my will and life over to God. However, the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) directions tell us that we have already made this decision on page 62 (bottom paragraph) and that this step was only a beginning. It was already made!

The Third Step Prayer requires asking God for relief from “the bondage of self,” although I had no precise knowledge of what of what that was. However, the bottom paragraph tells us to “launch out” on a course of vigorous action. I would think this requires writing Step Four so as to understand, to some degree, my shortcomings and defects of character. Also, I believe that Step Five was important to allow my sponsor to point out the further aspects of my bondage of self.

So, The Third step Prayer was only a beginning and will have “little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face and be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us.” (p. 64)

These additional steps were necessary to provide the information about what I was asking God to remove when I got to Step Seven!

I spent the first five months of my sobriety without doing the Step Three follow up as listed above and almost drank — thankfully I immediately found a sponsor who took me through all twelve steps and have not had to drink since. I will be eternally grateful for the clear-cut directions in the Big Book!
Writing for the COIN

Q: Who writes the COIN articles?
A: You do.

This is a publication forum for your personal stories celebrating sobriety and recovery. We welcome your stories, opinion pieces, learnings, questions, thoughts and ideas.

Q: What about Quality?
A: Don’t worry about that.

There is nothing more powerful than one alcoholic speaking with and supporting another alcoholic. Indeed, most of us never trusted a professional about our drinking. How could they possibly know about our drinking? But I believe other alcoholics. We are amateurs by design. So never worry about whether what you write is good enough. Just speak from the heart with honesty.

Q: What about sketches, photos, art and flyers?
A: Yes, please!

These are all welcomed and appreciated. We want to give A.A. members a chance to publish their original artwork and photos. We are not a glum lot and love humor, so please send in jokes and cartoons as well. We want the COIN to have a comprehensive listing of all upcoming events and flyers; email your event info as early as possible.

Q: What do I write about?
A: There are monthly newsletter topics that can be found in the COIN.

Each month’s topic is Step X, the Principle behind Step X, and Tradition X, where X is the number of the month. January=1 and December=12. For example, January’s topics are Step One, Honesty, and Tradition One. Stories about a month’s holidays or historic events are also accepted. For example, articles pertaining to a new year/new start in January, relationships and romance in February, stories about the founding of A.A. in June, independence in July, gratitude and giving thanks in November, etc. can all be fitting subject matter.

Write your stories in the first person (using “I” statements). Share your sobriety experience, strength, and hope: the wisdom you’ve gleaned, the mistakes you’ve made, the fun, the troubles, and humor you’ve found in recovery.
If you hear something at a meeting that makes you see things in a different light, write about it. If you have stayed sober through a difficult experience, write about it. Help us teach and learn from each other. Most importantly, help carry the message of A.A.

Q: What are the submission deadlines?
A: Deadlines are published in each month’s COIN.

If you miss the deadline, you may still send materials, but they may be saved for inclusion in a future COIN publication. Stories and art are published at the discretion of the COIN editor and the Central Office.

Q: What are the style guidelines?
A: We strive for consistency.

We accept writings from a variety of authors, then, edit them for style, length less than 900 words, correct spelling, fonts, and more. It is challenging to publish each issue in a timely manner. As editors, we do not change the message.

If you can follow some style guidelines, that would help us out a lot. Below is a non-exhaustive list of basic style guidelines.

1. Break all articles into several paragraphs, instead of one big paragraph.
2. Avoid long run-on sentences.
3. Use “A.A.” and not “AA”
4. For each article, the first mention of “The Big Book” must state the full name of the book underlined as in Alcoholics Anonymous (The Big Book) or The Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous). Same for 12 & 12.

Q: Anything else?
A: Yes.

Please keep the Twelve Traditions of A.A. in mind as you write. Take special care to respect other members’ anonymity. Have fun!

Send your submissions to: coin@aasanjose.org