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Searcy W
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An Address

Delivered To The

**Yale Institute
On Alcohol Studies
In the Southwest**

**Texas Christian
University
Fort Worth, Texas**

By: Searcy Whaley
Yale Institute Field Representative

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The name of the man who delivered this address has been withheld, but he is well known to most members of The Suburban Club of Dallas, and various other clubs in this city.

**Searcy W.
05/10/46**

My name is Searcy W. I am an alcoholic and a member of alcoholics Anonymous. Through following the program of Alcoholics Anonymous to the best of my ability and with the help of my own conception of a power greater than myself, I have not had a drink of any alcoholic beverage since May 10, 1946.

"For purpose of clarity, it is probably appropriate to quote a definition at this point: Alcoholics share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking. AA has no dues or fees. It is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution, does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and to help; other alcoholics achieve sobriety."

"The concluding words of this definition, which is quoted from our magazine, "The Grapevine", describes the essence of our program: "to help other alcoholics achieve sobriety."

"Let me hasten to add, just in case some of you may erroneously conclude that our motives are evangelical or reformatory, that we offer our help ONLY to those who want it --ONLY to sick alcoholics who specifically express an honest desire to stop drinking. AA is NOT interested in sobering up drunks who do not desire to remain completely sober for all time. We have not the remotest intention of attempting to interfere in any way with the normal and happy drinking practices of non-alcoholics.

"The fellowship of AA is composed of about 200,000 non drinking alcoholics of both sexes who are banded together in over 40 countries, and over 25,000 groups.

The groups vary in size from maybe half a dozen to several hundred members. Our oldest members have now been sober 15 or more years.

"in view of our almost complete lack of formal organization, accurate statistics are difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, experience has shown us that about 50 per cent of the SINCERE people who come to us are able to stop drinking at once, and another 25 percent stop after one or ore relapses into their old drinking pattern. Of the remaining 25 percent, we are not so sure. However, there is considerable evidence that a substantial number of these people return to the program of AA at some later date. Quite possibly ALL of them do -- if alcohol permits them to live long enough.

"For anyone who is attempting to probe the enigma of the success of the AA program, it is absolutely essential that he clearly understand that it embraces not a single NEW fundamental principle. It merely updates certain old and proven physical psychiatric and spiritual principles, harmonizes and crystallizes those principles, and presents them in crystallizes these principles, and presents them in such form that they will be understandable and acceptable to the generally confused mind of the alcoholic.

"If there is any answer to the often repeated question: "How does AA work?" it is probably contained in that triple approach.

"We do not attempt to attack the alcoholic problem from the physical side alone--as many physicians did for may years. We do not attempt to attack it from the mental side alone-- as many psychiatrists did for many years. Nor do we attempt to attack it from the spiritual or moral side alone-- as many clerics of most religious persuasions did for many years.

"We do not believe that any of these approaches, taken

alone, will result in any lasting success. But we do believe that ALL THREE approaches, taken simultaneously, WILL result in lasting success and THAT is the AA method.

A man sorely wounded in combat is almost certainly suffering from three distinct and dangerous conditions--any of which may produce death. He is bleeding from an open lesion of the flesh--so, the lesion is closed and bandaged. He is suffering from shock-- so he is given blood plasma or whole blood. He is suffering from, or in danger of infection-- so he is given a sulfur drug or one of the antibiotics, ALL THREE approaches are necessary to his recovery. Similarly, we believe that physical therapy, mental therapy and moral therapy are all essential to the recovery of the alcoholic.

"Anyone who attempts to describe the AA methods of arresting the disease of alcoholism as just another form of group therapy is indulging in rather dangerous oversimplification.

We members of AA have one outstanding natural advantage -- and we constantly endeavor to employ that advantage to the benefit of the sick alcoholic who seeks our assistance. That advantage is, of course, that we are ALL alcoholics who have had our disease arrested -- that we have, collectively, gone through all conceivable alcoholic experiences.

"Furthermore, it is difficult to deceive us in matters pertaining to drinking. Through long practice, we are past masters in the fields of deceit, evasion and preposterous rationalization. The new man realizes this quickly and without embarrassment or resentment. We reveal it to him through the simple and gentle expedient of relating our own alcoholic experiences and thought processes.

"He may not agree with all he hears; he may not understand much that he hears-- but he will listen, with an open mind-- and he will try to understand. He has hope where only hopelessness existed before.

Most important, he will come back. And if he continues to come back, he will get well.

"For the first time in many years, the newcomer feels not only understood but also useful -- and this is vastly important to his recovery. While in the throes of alcohol he has probably bragged outrageously about his accomplishments (real or imaginary); he has complained bitterly about people who could not or would not recognize his aptitudes and intellect, and he was deeply resented the world in general which has discriminated against and misunderstood him. But in his heart's heart -- in the innermost recesses of his constantly repressed subconscious thoughts -- is the full realization that as a DRINKING alcoholic, he is indeed utterly useless to himself and mankind. This realization is one of the most devastating CAUSES of the continuance of the vicious drinking cycle-- and it is from this humiliating reality that he is constantly seeking to escape through the ego inflating effects of alcohol.

" It cannot be too strongly emphasized that we are interested in offering this program only to those who want it and need it. We have no moral convictions about drinking. As a matter of fact, a very considerable percentage of the members of AA, habitually serve liquor in their own homes to their non-alcoholics guests when the occasion calls for it.

"There is, of course, an element of altruism in our practice of caring the message to other alcoholics. We have been released from the devastating effects of a dreaded disease (the fourth in magnitude in this coun-

try) It cannot be too strongly emphasized that we are interested in offering this program only to those who want it and need it. We have no moral convictions about drinking. As a matter of fact, a very considerable percentage of the members of AA, habitually serve liquor in their own homes to their non-alcoholics guests when the occasion calls for it.

"There is, of course, an element of altruism in our practice of caring the message to other alcoholics. We have been released from the devastating effects of a dreaded disease (the fourth in magnitude in this country) and as benevolent human beings we are anxious that other sufferers should be apprised of the course of relief, which has been afforded us. --Just as the early recipients of insulin treatment were AVIDLY anxious that other suffering diabetics should hear of the miraculous therapy.

"However, it is inescapably true that the PRINCIPAL reason for working diligently and constantly with other alcoholics is essentially a SELFISH reason. It is axiomatic with us -- we feel that it has been proven beyond any reasonable doubt -- that our greatest insurance against a relapse into our former habits of alcoholic thinking and alcoholic drinking is working with other alcoholics who are still afflicted with the disease. It is really as simple as that.

"For the benefit of those of you who are not familiar with the 12 suggested steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, I will read them:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol --that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to god, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continue to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM, praying only for the knowledge of his Will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

"Reduced to their briefest terms these suggest steps man simple these five things:

1. Admission of Alcoholism
2. Personality analysis
3. Adjustment of personal relations
4. Dependence on some Higher power
5. Working with other alcoholics.

"Let me emphasize strongly that adherence to these principles in NOT, definitely NOT, a condition to AA membership. Any person, who admits that he has an alcoholic problem and wants to go along with us, is a member of AA regardless of how much he may disagree with the program. These are merely suggested steps -- and they are based on our experience as alcoholics whose disease has been arrested. These are the

steps, which we try to follow and which we HAVE followed to the best of our ability. I know of no one who has been able to adhere completely to all of the steps all of time.

"Concerning the first four three approaches to the problem, I would like to point out that there is but one reference to alcohol in the steps -- and that is in the first part of the first step: We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol. That is to say we acknowledge that we are physically unable to assimilate alcohol, as the vast majority of NON alcoholic people are able to assimilate it.

Pursuant to the advice of our medical friends, we counsel our new members to take vitamins regularly for the first few weeks of their sobriety,

and we warn them of the grave danger of permitting themselves to become either too tired or too hungry.

In cases where the physical ravages of the disease of alcoholism are obviously advanced, we suggest a brief period of hospitalization under care of medical personnel specially trained in that field. AND THAT IS OUR FIRST, OR PHYSICAL, APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM.

"For our second approach to the problem, we look at the second step (and please don't be discouraged, I'm not going to analyze and discuss each step separately), but in this second step, we find the worlds restore us to sanity. Some of our new members are alarmed or even infuriated by this expression--and some of the families and friends of the alcoholics are highly indignant that it should be implied that their loved one is, as the express, crazy. The answer is simple-we imply nothing of the sort. That is, the implication is NOT that the man is psychotic in the medical sense or that he is

insane (unable to distinguish right from wrong) in the legal sense.

"One generally accepted dictionary definition of insanity is this: Any mental DISORDER CAUSED BY DISEASE, characterized by temporary or permanent irrational or violent deviations from normal thinking, feeling or behavior.

"Sounds like a fairly accurate description of every advance alcoholic that any of us has ever known, doesn't it? There is little doubt in the minds of most of us, new or old, in AA that we fell squarely within the purview of this definition WHILE we were drinking - - but ONLY while we were drinking. And that we have been relieved of the stigma almost immediately that our alcoholic problem had been brought under control. And this, I believe, constitutes our MENTAL approach to our common malady.

"For our third (or spiritual) approach to the problem, I invite your attention to the third step, which I will reread: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

"To those among you who are less ecclesiastically inclined, it may appear that there is an over abundance, in these steps of reference to a Power greater than ourselves -- or to God as we understood Him.

"But whether or not there is such a reaction from this audience, you may rest assured that we frequently experience a fairly violent reaction of that nature from newcomers to the program. Many of them feel that the religion in which they were reared has failed them in their efforts to extricate themselves from the dilemma of alcoholism. Others, in their degradation, have been ashamed to ask for spiritual guidance -- even if their faith has not been destroyed.

"Still others, with no reasonable or rational explanation of their attitude, are militantly opposed to this religious business or this God business. I might add that I was one of the most passionate adherents to this outrageous school of thought, at the time I first embraced this program.

"This is NOT a religious program. There is no ritual, no dogma, no required beliefs--no prohibitions. Each member interprets and applies it according to his own understanding or his own convictions.

"To the man who, for any reason whatsoever, finds the spiritual aspects repugnant, we only ask that he keep an open mind while he continues to attend our meetings and converse with our members. In the meantime, he consider his own AA group as a power greater than himself.

"Under these conditions, a personality change is inevitable--and the change is so steady and of such proportions that he cannot possibly account for it on the simple basis of self-analysis and self-discipline. It is almost inescapable that he realizes that some force outside himself has been working. With this realization -- with the clarification of his thinking and with his new-found tranquility and peace of mind -- he is capable of forming his own private concept of higher power--or God, if he chooses to employ that word,

I repeat that is TRULY NOT a religious program--but at the same time it is, most emphatically, a spiritual program--that is, it is NOT an intellectual proposition. People who come into the movement with a purely intellectual approach, invariably flounder around ineffectually (that is, they get drunk again, as I did) unless they evolve a spiritual concept before they relapse. Success is ALWAYS predicated on a man's deep and abiding faith--faith in the program, faith in himself,

and above all, faith in his own conception of a higher Power.

"The term spiritual experience which appears in the 12th step and which appears numerous times in the book Alcoholics Anonymous, also creates considerable consternation among some of the new members. Most of us understand that this does NOT imply any sudden, blinding or spectacular upheaval. We feel that the amazing personality change, sufficient to permit release from the alcoholic obsession, is indeed a spiritual experience. These experiences are what the psychologist, William James, calls EDUCATIONAL VARIETY because they are gradual rather than instantaneous. AND THIS, I THINK SUMMARIZES OUR SUGGESTED MORAL SOLUTION TO OUR PROBLEM.

The rest of the steps delineate a design for living in harmony with our fellow men. Furthermore, we believe it or be a design for living to which very few san, law-abiding people could take exception. However, we know that these steps represent principles which we, as defiant, self-centered alcoholics, have wantonly violated, either in part or in their entirety during the years in which our disease of alcoholism was in its advanced stages and quite possibly prior to that time.

There are probably few people who have come into AA who have worried about the spiritual aspects of this program more than I have. I swam in a sea of almost utter confusion and conflict for a dangerously long period of time. As I look back on it now, I am amazed that I managed to maintain sobriety during this period. But I did and at this point, I am glad to say, with great humility, that I thank god I did.

I had been dry, as you say, for about two years before

my thinking crystallized on this subject. And such crystallization as occurred then come about, I feel sure, because I ceased to strive so intensely to attain a very definite and specific conception of a higher power, in any case, I did attain a peace of Mind I had never know before. Now my faith, in my somewhat nebulous conception of a higher power, is implicit. But I would be completely at loss if I were to attempt to EXPLAIN my conception to another person.

I feel sure that I am not a Christian in the accepted sense of the work.. That used to bother me but it doesn't bother me any more, and I KNOW that it doesn't interfere with my acceptance and practice of this program, which is the most important thing in my life. I certainly believe in the so-called Christian way of life and furthermore, I believe that I follow this way of life with a diligence, which is at least equal to that of the majority of the devout men of my acquaintance. If I didn't I don't think I would be sober now.

"I feel that it would be negligent to omit from this discourse at least a brief discussion of the second word in the name of our fellowship; i.e. the word Anonymous. Anonymity has been a controversial subject since the inception of the organization; and it probably always will because each group is an entity within itself; and there is no procedure or policy directives handed down from an administrative echelon. In fact, no such echelon exists.

"About the only unopposed custom or criterion on the subject of anonymity is that NO member is justified in revealing the name of another member without that other member's specific authority. Fortunately this custom is rarely, if ever, violated.

"In actual practice most of us, after an appreciable period of sobriety, have dropped our anonymity inso-

far as our daily and intimate contacts are concerned. In fact, instead of being preoccupied about concealing our membership, most of us are quite proud of it. Membership in AA has an appreciably higher standing in the community than did our former reputations as drinking alcoholics. This, however, is a matter for each individual to decide according to his own lights.

"The final analysis of the subject of anonymity is probably best expressed in the words which our founder employed in an article he wrote several years ago. He said: In the years that lie ahead, the principle of anonymity will undoubtedly become a part of our vital tradition. Even today we sense its practical value. But more important still, we are beginning to feel that THE WORD ANONYMOUS HAS, FOR US, IMMENSE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE, SUBTLY BUT POWERFULLY IT REMINDS US THAT WE ARE ALWAYS TO PLACE PRINCIPLES BEFORE PERSONALITIES. THAT WE HAVE RENOUNCED PERSONAL GLORIFICATION: THAT OUR MOVEMENT NOT ONLY REACHES BUT ACTUALLY PRACTICES HUMILITY. That the practice of anonymity in our public relations has already had a profound effect upon us, and upon millions of friends in the outside world, there can hardly be doubt.."

I am in complete accord with the founder's views but so far as I am personally concerned, I don't give a damn who knows that I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

"It is said that no one is ready to accept and follow the program of AA until he can no longer endure himself as he is. It is not a matter of enduring the physical anguish of hangovers, the privations of the economic disaster, the ostracism by friends, relatives and business associates, the repeated hospitalizations (or jailings) or the rending, abject loneliness that only an

alcoholic has known and that ever alcoholic has known. It is said to be something more profound than that. It is when a man is horrified and revolted by himself and by his degradation that death would be preferable to continued existence at the same nauseating level. Then we say that he has hit bottom--and he is ready. Obviously this BOTTOM will vary considerably according to the sensibilities of the afflicted individual concerned.

"All this is undoubtedly true. However, it is my carefully considered opinion that ALL people, men or women, who come into AA are motivated to do so by just one thing: FEAR. I don't mean physical fear of concrete or recognizable consequences. I mean a pathological, maniacal, unreasoning fear of indescribable and usually wholly non-existent things. These are the agonizing fears which we all experienced, for greater or lesser periods, depending on the gravity of our disease before we hit bottom.

"These were fears from which from which alcohol provided magnificent release for a long time--but which, eventually, refused to abate regardless of the amount of alcohol consumed. This, I think, was the fringe of madness and even our temporarily deranged minds told us that we could go no further along the path of alcoholism. From these fears, I further believe, there is but one route of escape. And that is faith. The faith I previously mentioned in the AA program, in one's self and in a higher power.

"None of us are long in AA, without hearing or reading a brief little prayer which all of us carry in our minds and which most of us repeat at least once each day. It goes like this:

"God grant me the serenity to accept those things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can,

and the wisdom to know the difference.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have made an earnest effort to convey to you, in the brief time available, an overall picture of what the program of AA means to me-- Just one man whose disease of alcoholism has been arrested through the medium of this program and by the grace of a Higher Power whom I choose to call God.

"Please understand that what I have said to you expresses my own personal opinions as of today. I do not speak for AA as a whole. Not even the founder is vested with the right to do that.

"To those of you who were not already familiar with the workings of this fellowship, I can only say that I hope you leave here with some understanding of the deep sincerity which is in my heart. And in the hearts of all of us who seek to help the sick alcoholic.

"You may like this program of AA or you may not--but the fact remains that it works. The program NEVER fails--unfortunately a few individuals DO fail in their application of it.

"Above all, I hope that you may not leave here today holding any contempt for our organization and our efforts.

"I attended my first AA meeting with NOTHING in my heart but cynicism and contempt. In fact, as that meeting neared its conclusion, I still harbored nothing but contempt for what I cynically classified as a crackpot, fanatical group misguided do-gooders. AT THAT POINT, the speaker (who later years became one of my most valued friends) opened this AA book to page 380--and read aloud this quotation from the writings of Herbert Spencer:

"There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance--that principle is contempt prior to investigation.

"I thank God that I swept aside my contempt and investigated further--for otherwise, I am sure that I would not be alive today."

NOTES