

“Big Book Comes Alive” Study Group



**Joe & Charlie
Audio Workshop**

Big Book Comes Alive Study Group

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WEEK #1

About the Joe & Charlie Sessions

Joe McQ. and Charlie P. met in 1973 when Joe introduced Charlie as the AA speaker at an AlAnon convention. Joe had wondered if Charlie P. might be the country singer Charlie Pride. "he wasn't even the right color," Joe laments.

They instantly discovered their mutual fascinations with AA's basic textbook, Alcoholics Anonymous commonly called "The Big Book". What interested them mostly was that The Big Book was written in a particular sequence to convey certain ideas. That interest became close friendship, which has lasted over 20 years.

They would frequently meet to discuss The Big Book, often driving 225 miles to meet in each other's homes. Soon they were planning meetings in hotel rooms at AA conventions in Oklahoma and Arkansas and, within a few years, the meetings grew in popularity.

In 1977, some AA members met in a Tulsa, Oklahoma hotel room for a discussion on The Big Book. One member asked Joe and Charlie to come to his home group to present a program on The Big Book. A taping of that presentation was made and called "The Big Book Study". Through the circulation of these audio tapes throughout the Fellowship, Joe and Charlie received invitations to present the Study at AA conventions, roundups and special events. By 1980, there were about eight studies offered each year.

At the AA International Convention in New Orleans in 1980, Wesley P, an impassioned AA "Big Booker" from Pompano Beach, Florida, organized a lunch for 1,500 AA members from all over the world and gave away 100 Joe & Charlie tape sets as door prizes. Invitations exploded, and within a couple of years Joe & Charlie were presenting about 36 seminars a year worldwide.

These seminars struck a deep chord within the AA members ... for the reaffirmation of "this message" as written April 1939 with the publication of the first edition of Alcoholics Anonymous. Big Book Studies presented by Joe & Charlie have been given in all 50 states as well as most Canadian provinces in addition to Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, Iceland, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and Holland.

The original Joe, Joe McQ, has had to cut back his traveling in recent years. Oddly enough, another Joe - Joe McC (who was active in the study group since the beginning) has been able to pick up the slack. "where God guides, God provides", as some members say.

Joe & Charlie are not paid for their services. In fact, the only financial compensation they receive is their travel expenses, meals, and lodging which are paid for by the independent host committee sponsoring the Big Book Studies. Further, this is in accordance with the AA Guidelines of Conferences & Conventions (MG4), published by the General Service Office.

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In the past 24 years, an estimated 200,000 members of various 12 step programs have experienced the spiritual benefits of these collective seminars. One of their stops was at the Melville Marriot in Melville - Long Island NY over the weekend of June 19 - 21. 1998. I was privileged to be amongst the 400+ people who were there. They start at the chapter - The Doctors Opinion, and over the course of the next 2 days take us all the way through to the final words of the chapter - A Vision for You - "We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you - until then." (Page 164).

In between they show us how simple and uncomplicated it can be to complete a Fourth Step Inventory, as well as allowing us to hear the experience, strength, and hope that they have been fortunate to enjoy in many, many years of spiritual sobriety. They both showed all of us that It works - It really works ! all we have to do is follow the directions given to us by the first 68 members of AA who spent time with Bill Wilson and gave the world Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book) in 1939.

Joe McQ. from Little Rock, Arkansas, of the original Joe and Charlie Big Book Studies, moved on to another life October 25, 2007.

Not much is known about Charlie P. - we think he values his anonymity.



Charlie P.

Joe McQ.

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WEEK #1

The History behind the Big Book - Forward to the Second Edition

(Session 01a - 10:19.)

J & C If we're going to study the Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous, which of course that's what we're here for this weekend, I think it would be well if we would go back and look at just a little bit of the history behind the book, be able to see what happened to some of the first people that put this thing together and by looking at that history then it's going to make it a lot easier to understand the book itself as we go through that. And what we like to do to look at some of the history is to go to the forward of the 2nd Edition, Roman Numeral XV and we'll start with the last paragraph on that page so everybody that's got your books if you're ready, Roman Numeral XV and the last paragraph on that page, Joe.

One of the things that has helped me over the years in studying Bill's writings and he does this in most all of his writings, you can follow along with what he does and it'll help you understand some of his writings. For instance he'll always tell us what the problem is, then he'll tell us the solution to that problem, and then he'll give us a practical program of action to implement the solution that he just described. He does that in most all cases of his writings so that kind of helped me, in understanding how Bill writes. So the bottom of page, on Roman Numeral page XV,

Big Book p. xv, par. 4 *"The spark that was to flare into the first A.A. group was struck at Akron, Ohio, in June 1935, during a talk between a New York stockbroker and an Akron physician."*

J & C Now we now that New York City stockbroker to be this fellow named Bill Wilson. I think we're treating Bill pretty good when we call him a New York stockbroker. He really wasn't, he was a New York City stock speculator. He made his living out of selling fast-talking to slow thinking people. I don't want take anything away from Bill because he's a great man, but I think we all need to realize that he's a real alcoholic just like all the rest of us, and understanding that it'll make it easier to understand the book, because after all, Bill is the primary author of the book. The Akron physician is this fellow named Dr. Bob Smith.

Big Book p. xv, par. 4 *"Six months earlier, the broker had been relieved of his drink obsession by a sudden spiritual experience, following a meeting with an alcoholic friend who had been in contact with the Oxford Groups of that day."*

J & C A little later on we're going to get into Bill's story and we're going to see in Bill's story where he had, what he always called, a vital spiritual experience in the Towns Hospital in December of 1934. Now prior to him having that spiritual experience, certain things had to take place in Bill's life. And one of the things was that this meeting with the alcoholic friend took place in the later part of November 1934 and this was a fellow named Ebby Thatcher. And Ebby Thatcher came with Bill and sat down in Bill's kitchen and he gave Bill what turned out to be two vital pieces of information. He said Bill,

people like you and I who have become absolutely powerless over alcohol,
if we're going to have to recover from that condition, we're going to have to have the aid of a
power greater than human power.

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He said the doctors, and the ministers and the psychiatrists have tried to help people like us but human power doesn't seem to be able to do the job. And he said, we'll have to have the aid of a power greater than human power. And he said I've been attending meetings with a group of people called the Oxford

Groupers and they told me if I could have a spiritual experience*, that during that spiritual experience I would be able to find that power, and I would be able to recover from alcoholism. He said also they have given me a practical **program of action**

(now the 12 Steps).

They GUARANTEED me if I would follow that program of action:

- (1) **I would have the spiritual experience*,**
- (2) **I would find the power and**
- (3) **I would be able to recover from alcoholism.**

And he said, look at me Bill; it's been two months since I've had a drink. Now Bill knew about Ebby Thatcher, and he knew how Ebby drank. In fact Bill had always said, if I ever get as bad as Ebby Thatcher I'm going to quit drinking. And here's Ebby sitting in Bill's kitchen and Bill is about two thirds drunk and Ebby's been sober for two months. This made a great impression on Bill when he told him of the solution, the vital spiritual experience*, and he told him of the practical program of action necessary to have that spiritual experience. But that isn't everything Bill had to know. Let's go a little further.

* "... a profound alteration in his reaction to life."
See Appendix II Spiritual Experience, Big Book pg. 569

Big Book p. xvi, line 3 *"He had also been greatly helped by the late Dr. William D. Silkworth, a New York specialist in alcoholism who is now accounted no less than a medical saint by A.A. members, and whose story of the early days of our Society appears in the next pages. From this doctor, the broker had learned the grave nature of alcoholism."*

J & C Again as we get into Bill's story, we'll be able to see how as far back as the summer of 1933, Bill was placed in the Towns Hospital, for withdrawal from alcohol by Dr. Silkworth. And after he had been in there a few days and his mind kind of cleared up Dr Silkworth sat down with Bill and began to explain to him his ideas about this thing concerning alcoholism. And he said Bill;

I do not believe that alcoholism is a matter of willpower;
I do not believe it's a matter of moral character,
and I don't think sin has got anything to do with it. I believe people like you are suffering from an illness, and he said it seems to be a very peculiar illness;
it's a **two-fold illness, an illness of the body as well as an illness of the mind.**

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And he said I think what has happened to people like you is

you've become absolutely **physically allergic to alcohol.**

And it seems to me as though anytime you put any alcohol whatsoever into your system it develops an actual **physical craving**

which makes it virtually impossible for you to stop drinking after you have once started.

And he said because of that allergy which produces that physical craving you'll never be able to safely drink alcohol again.

And he said you also have developed what we refer to as an **obsession of the mind.**

And he said an obsession of the mind is an idea that overcomes all other ideas to the contrary.

He said it really doesn't make any difference how badly you want to stop drinking.

From time to time

your obsession of the mind to drink will be so strong that it will overcome any ideas not to drink and your mind will actually lead you to believing it's okay to take a drink.

And he said then you'll take that drink, and then you'll trigger that allergy and you'll be unable to stop.

He said you can't safely drink because of your body,
you can't stay sober because of your mind,
therefore you've become absolutely powerless over alcohol.

Now Bill knew that in the summer of 1933, **BUT KNOWING THE PROBLEM DIDN'T SOLVE IT,** because shortly after that his mind told him it was okay to drink. And he took a drink, and triggered the allergy and drank for another year.

In the summer of 1934 he was placed back in the hospital again to be withdrawn from alcohol by Dr. Silkwood. And this time Dr. Silkworth pronounced him incurable, and told Bill's wife Lois that this guy is either going to die from DT's or he's going to be completely insane from a wet brain and you're going to have to lock him up or hire a bodyguard if you expect him to live. And Bill overheard that and he said this time fear sobered him for a bit. But then on Armistice Day 1934 his mind told him it was okay to drink. And he took a drink and triggered the allergy and couldn't stop drinking.

It's ONLY AFTER Ebby came to see him and gave him the solution to that problem and gave him a program of action that Bill was able to recover. So basically he had to know three things,

- (1) **HE HAD TO KNOW THE PROBLEM** he got that from Dr. Silkwood, (p. 7, par. 2),
- (2) **HE HAD TO KNOW THE SOLUTION** (p. 12, par. 4; p. 27, par. 5),
- (3) **AND THE PROGRAM OF ACTION** that came to him from Ebby (Oxford Group) (p. xvi, par. 1-2)

THEN BILL WAS ABLE TO HAVE HIS SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AND **RECOVER** FROM ALCOHOLISM.

to regain health of body and mind



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And Ebby began to take Bill to these Oxford Group meetings after that and it says,

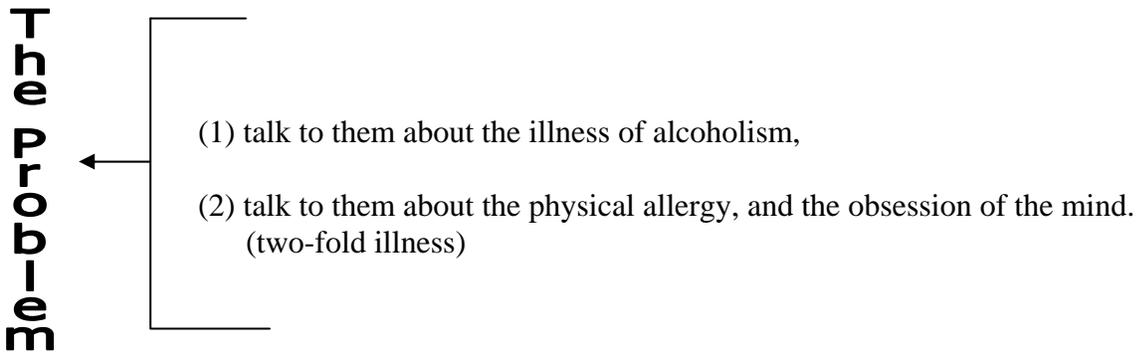
Big Book p. xvi, line 9 “Though he could not accept all the tenets of the Oxford Groups, he was convinced of the need for moral inventory, confession of personality defects, restitution to those harmed, helpfulness to others, and the necessity of belief in and dependence upon God.”

J & C Which were the tenets of the Oxford Group, which were later on expanded into the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Big Book p. xvi, line 9 “Prior to his journey to Akron, the broker had worked hard with many alcoholics on the theory that only an alcoholic could help an alcoholic, but succeeded only in keeping sober himself.

J & C After Bill got out of the hospital that last time he began to try to help other people. He began to go out and save them up out of the gutters and take them to these Oxford Group meetings. He began to go into the bars and drag them off a bar stool and take them to the Oxford Group meetings. Most of them didn't want to go but he was taking them anyhow. He was trying to sober up the world; he had lots of enthusiasm. But after a few months of trying to do this why, nobody was staying sober but Bill. And he went to Lois and said Lois I'm trying to help these people, these alcoholics stay sober, and nobody seems to want to stay sober. And she said why don't you go talk to Dr. Silkwood and see what he has to say. So he went over to talk to Dr. Silkwood and told him the same story. And Dr. Silkwood said, yes, I've heard some of the shenanigans you're pulling out there on the streets. He said you know Bill, you're staying sober, so obviously trying to help other people is helping you stay sober.

And he said, you're talking to those drunks about that great spiritual experience that you've had, and a drunk just won't accept that. He said why don't you do for them what I did for you. Why don't you



Show them through your experience how that worked for you and if they will accept that, then maybe you can

(3) talk to them about spiritual matters.

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The History Behind the Big Book - Forward to the Second Edition

(Session01b - 10:15.)

He said Bill; every alcoholic I know has two questions:

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1. Why can't I drink like I used to without getting drunk all the time, and
2. Why can't I quit drinking now that I want to?

- (1) Explain to them the exact nature of the illness,
- (2) tell them about the physical allergy of the body and the obsession of the mind (two-fold illness), you'll get their attention.
- (3) Then after you get their attention you can talk to them about spirituality.

TELL THEM WHAT THE PROBLEM IS FIRST.

Now our book says,

Big Book, p. xvi, line 18

“The broker had gone to Akron on a business venture which had collapsed, leaving him greatly in fear that he might start drinking again. He suddenly realized that in order to save himself he must carry his message to another alcoholic. And that alcoholic turned out to be the Akron physician.”

J & C And we all know the story of Bill going to Akron. He and some other guys had put a business deal together. They were going to take over one of the companies there in Akron just through a proxy fight. And while there the whole thing blew up in the face, and his friends all deserted him and left him there in Akron, standing in the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel. Low, sad and depressed, counting the money in his pocket realized he didn't even have enough money to pay his hotel bill. He happened to look through a door off the lobby, into the bar. And I would assume probably the lights were low in the bar, the music was probably playing in the bar, the laughter was great and the smoke was thick, and Bill's mind said I believe I'll go in there and be with people of my kind and I'll feel better. And as he started through the door his mind began to think about taking a drink.

And Bill suddenly realized that if he went in that bar he was going to end up drunk. But he remembered how back in New York City, every time he had tried to help another alcoholic, even though he had failed with them, every time he had tried he himself had felt better. So he said to himself, what I had better do is find me a drunk here in Akron to talk to. Made a few phone calls and came in contact with a lady named Henrietta Seiberling. And Henrietta said, yeah, I know a guy that you can talk to. She said, let me call him and see if I can't set up a meeting for you.

So she calls Dr. Bob's house and got hold of Anne Smith, Bob's wife. And said there's a fellow here from New York City that says he may have a possible means that Dr. Bob could recover from alcoholism. Can you bring Dr. Bob over for a visit? And Anne said well I'd like to but she said you know this is the day before Mother's Day, and he brought me home a potted plant, and it's sitting on the table and he's potted underneath the table.

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She said let me wait until the morning and see if I can get him to come over. So of course the next morning as soon as Dr. Bob woke up she set in on him to go over to Henrietta's and see this guy, and to talk to this guy from New York City. Now you know Dr. Bob didn't feel very good the next morning. Hung over and felt bad and he said I'm not going. And Anne kept after him and kept after him and kept after him and finally, finally Dr. Bob said I'll go over there and give that guy fifteen minutes of my time, and then I'm coming back home. So Anne took him over there, and Bill and Bob went into a room by themselves and they stayed in that room for literally hours. And Dr. Bob came out of that room and he said this is the first man I've ever met that knows what he's talking about when he talks about alcoholism. Let's see what happened to him

Big Book, p. xvi, par. 3 *“This physician had repeatedly tried spiritual means to resolve his alcoholic dilemma but had failed.”*

J & C Bill was surprised to find out Dr. Bob was already in the Oxford Groups. He knew more about the solution: the spiritual experience and the program of action than Bill knew, but he had never been able to apply it to the depth necessary to recover, cause he didn't know what was wrong with him. You see he thought it was willpower. He thought it was moral character. He thought it was sin.

Why would he not, that's what everybody had told him up until that time? And what really interested him was the message that Bill had to carry regarding the problem, not the solution, not the program of action, but what alcoholism really consists of.

Big Book, p. xvi, par. 3 *“But when the broker gave him Dr. Silkworth's description of alcoholism and it's hopelessness, the physician began to pursue the spiritual remedy for his malady with a willingness he had never before been able to muster. He sobered, never to drink again up until the moment of his death in 1950.”*

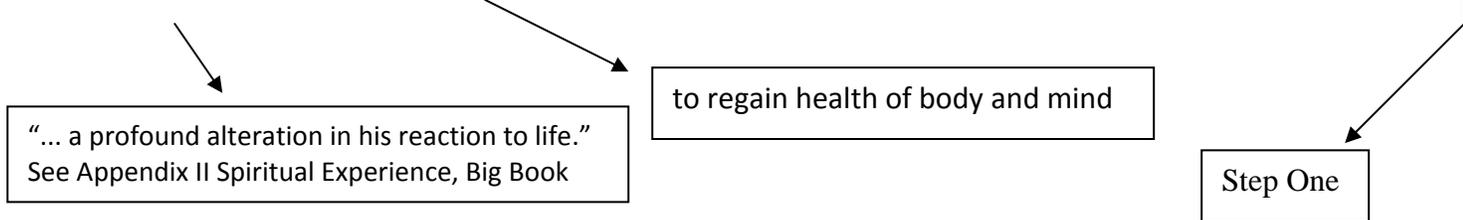
J & C Bill went in there this time, for the first time he began to talk to Dr. Bob about the allergy of alcoholism. He told him that every time that he would go down by the bar and had every intention to have a drink or two, he would drink more than he intended to, he'd drink more that night or the next day and he'd be off and running again. And he said this Dr. Silkworth had told him that that was a physical allergy that caused him to want to crave more drinks after he took a drink and Dr. Bob said well yes I drink just like that, you really know what your talking about, that's the way I drink too. I would want to have one or two drinks, the next thing I know is I'd drink three, four, five, ten, or fifteen or twenty and didn't know how I got started. He said, you call that a physical allergy that? He said that's right. And he said, another thing he said, when I'm not drinking when I'm sober, I have these thoughts that I want to drink all the time, it's always on my mind, and Dr. Silkworth said, that's the obsession of the mind that would obsess for the idea to drink. And Dr. Bob said, well I have those same kinds of thoughts; you really know what you're talking about. So they reached a rapport through the illness of alcoholism. And he explained it at great detail, and Dr. Bob said that's me, that's just the way I drank. You really know what you're talking about. So they had some identification going.

Now this is the first time that Bill had tried this. Everybody back in New York City, he'd always talked to them about the solution: the great spiritual experience, the big white flash he'd had in the Towns Hospital. When he sat down with Dr. Bob, he didn't talk to Dr. Bob at all about Dr. Bob's drinking either. I'm sure that's what Dr. Bob expected to hear. Everybody else had talked to him about his drinking, but Bill said, let me tell you about my drinking. And through the sharing of his story, talking about his own allergy, Dr. Bob could see himself immediately in it.

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And he could see where he had become absolutely powerless over alcohol. And for the first time he was completely defeated when it comes to alcohol.

Then he began to apply the little program of action to a depth he had never been able to do before. Then he had a **spiritual experience** and he **recovered** from alcoholism too.



Big Book, p. xvi, par. 3 *"This seemed to prove that one alcoholic could affect another as no nonalcoholic could."*

J & C Through the sharing of our story with a new person, we can affect them as no non-alcoholic could because we have immediate identification

- (1) about the physical allergy,
- (2) about the obsession of the mind,
- (3) about the way we think and the things that we do.

Big Book, p. xvii, par. 1 *"It also indicated that strenuous work, one alcoholic with another, was vital to permanent recovery."*

J & C Remember Bill was about to get drunk., and he really didn't go see Dr. Bob to sober up Dr. Bob. He went to see Dr. Bob to keep Bill Wilson from drinking. So it proved that night that working with another alcoholic was vital for our own recovery too. Now immediately, one of the Oxford Group tenets was you got to give it away if you're going to keep it. So immediately they made a decision that we're

going to have to find us another alcoholic to talk to. Dr. Bob called the Akron City Hospital where he was actually working at that time. Talked to the head nurse and said do you have an alcoholic down there that we can come and talk to? We believe we've found a way to help him overcome alcoholism. She said, oh yeah, we've got a real one down here. He just blacked both eyes of one of the nurses, said we've got him tied down in bed. And Dr. Bob said put him in a private room, we'll be down in the morning to see him. And she said okay, and by the way Dr. Bob, have you tried this on yourself?

So the next morning they go down to see this fellow. He's named Bill Dobson, and you see the picture in AA rooms all over the world of the man on the bed. And this is Bill and Bob sitting there talking to Bill Dobson. Now they didn't talk to Bill Dobson about Bill Dobson's drinking.

They talked to him about their own drinking.

And through the sharing of their stories Bill Dobson could immediately see what his problem was. See he'd never known about the allergy and the obsession of the mind.

He could accept the fact that he was absolutely powerless over alcohol, and he would have to have the aid of a power greater than himself in order to **recover**.

They began to talk to him about the need for the spiritual experience.

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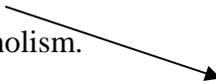
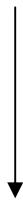
How they had found that necessary to apply those things in their lives in order to recover.

They told him how they applied the little program of action and the results that they got.

Two days later Bill Dobson said to his wife get my clothes out of the closet, I'm going home.

And he gets up and he dresses and he goes home and he starts applying the program of action. And low and behold he had a vital spiritual experience and he **recovered** from alcoholism also.

Now this makes three of them. In the summer of 1935 in Akron they all three know the problem, they all three know the solution, they've all three applied the program of action, They've had a spiritual experience* and they have **recovered** from alcoholism.



**THE 12
STEPS**

to regain health of body and mind

“... a profound alteration in his reaction to life.”
See Appendix II Spiritual Experience, Big Book pg. 569.